

VISIT...

LANZAROTE
Caliente.COM

ECLIPSE
GRAPHIC NOVELS

CLIVE BARKER



THE YATTERING AND JACK

Artists John Bolton and Hector Gomez
Stories adapted by Steve Niles and Fred Burke



CLIVE BARKER was born in Liverpool in 1952. He is the author of *The Books of Blood*, *The Damnation Game*, *Weaveworld*, *Cabal*, *The Great and Secret Show*, *The Hellbound Heart*, *Imajica* and *The Thief of Always*. In addition to his work as a novelist and short story writer, he is also an accomplished illustrator and writes, directs and produces for the stage and screen. His spectacular films the *Hellraiser* trilogy, *Nightbreed* and *Candyman* bring his unique and indelible vision of modern horror to celluloid and video life. Barker uses all aspects of popular culture to substantiate his extraordinary insight into the menacing present. Millions of readers and filmgoers have been captivated by Barker's prodigious talents; now graphic novel adaptations of his stories add a further dimension to his hold on the popular imagination. Clive Barker lives in Los Angeles, where he continues his love affair with the bizarre, the perverse and the terrifying.

INTERNATIONAL ACCLAIM FOR
CLIVE BARKER:

'Barker is so good I am almost tongue-tied. What Barker does makes the rest of us look like we've been asleep for the last ten years.'

STEPHEN KING

'A powerful and fascinating writer with a brilliant imagination.'

J. G. BALLARD

'Clive Barker has been an amazing writer from his first appearance, with great gifts of invention and commitment to his own vision stamped on every page.'

PETER STRAUB

BOOKS BY CLIVE BARKER

The Books of Blood (*six volumes*)

The Damnation Game

Weaveworld

Cabal

The Great and Secret Show

The Hellbound Heart

Imajica

The Thief of Always

Clive Barker, Illustrator

GRAPHIC STORIES BY CLIVE BARKER

Tapping the Vein (*five volumes*)

Son of Celluloid

THE ARTISTS

John Bolton

lives in North London, painting in his eerie, prop-filled studio. (Many of the extraordinary objects surrounding his drawing board are dead or asleep.) He studied illustration and design at East Ham Technical College, in East London, and worked for British magazines and book publishers, painting covers and artwork. He began working in comics in the late 1970s and eventually broke into the big American comic market, expanding his field to include work on a number of movies. He is currently working on *Man-Bat*, the latest Batman epic. He has produced the graphic adaptation of *Army of Darkness*, Sam Raimi's film, and contributed to the graphic novel adaptation of the album *Freak Show* by the Residents.

Hector Gomez

was born in Argentina and now lives in Brazil. He has had two graphic novels published in Brazil, *Samsara* and *Amazing Muchachos*. He works as an illustrator for mainstream magazines and exhibits canvases at exhibitions. His covers for Malibu Comics include *Dollman*, *Rocket Ranger*, *Jungle Love* and *Paranoia*.

CLIVE BARKER

THE YATTERING AND JACK

Adapted by Steve Niles
Illustrated by John Bolton

A N D

HOW SPOILERS BLEED

Adapted by Steve Niles and Fred Burke
Illustrated by Hector Gomez

Eclipse  Books

Eclipse Graphic Novels

An Imprint of Eclipse Books and HarperCollins Publishers

Available to the comic book trade in the U.S. and Canada from
Eclipse Books
P.O. Box 1099
Forestville, California 95436

Published by Eclipse Books 1993

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN 1 56060 183 3

The Yattering and Jack Copyright © Clive Barker 1991

Adaptation Copyright © Steve Niles 1991

Artwork Copyright © John Bolton 1991

How Spoilers Bleed Copyright © Clive Barker 1992

Adaptation Copyright © Steve Niles and Fred Burke 1992

Artwork Copyright © Hector Gomez 1992

Printed and bound in Hong Kong

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission from the publisher, except in the case of the reproduction of no more than one page of artwork and accompanying text embodied in critical articles and reviews.



WHY THE POWERS (LONG MAY THEY
HOLD COURT; LONG MAY THEY SHIT
LIGHT ON THE HEADS OF THE DAMNED)
HAD SENT IT OUT FROM HELL, FROM
HOME, THE YATTERING COULDN'T
DISCOVER.

WHENEVER IT PASSED A TENTATIVE
INQUIRY ALONG THE SYSTEM TO ITS
MASTER, JUST ASKING THE SIMPLE
QUESTION, "WHAT AM I DOING HERE?";
IT WAS ANSWERED WITH A SWIFT
REBUKE FOR ITS CURIOSITY.

NONE OF ITS BUSINESS!
CAME THE REPLY, ITS
BUSINESS WAS TO DO.

OR DIE TRYING.

TO A CREATURE TRAINED TO PUT ITS NEEDLING FINGERS INTO THE WOUNDS OF THE HUMAN PSYCHE, POLO OFFERED A GLACIAL SURFACE. EVENTS SEEMED TO MAKE NO DENT IN HIS PERFECT INDIFFERENCE.

HIS LIFE'S DISASTERS SEEMED NOT TO SCAR HIS MIND AT ALL.

THESE THINGS HAPPEN. QUE SERÁ, SERÁ.

QUE SERÁ SERÁ. THE MAN MUTTERED THAT DAMN PHRASE WITH MONOTONOUS REGULARITY. HE SEEMED TO LIVE BY THAT PHILOSOPHY OF FATALISM, LETTING ATTACKS ON HIS MANHOOD, AMBITION AND DIGNITY SLIDE OFF HIS EGO LIKE RAIN-WATER FROM HIS BALD HEAD.

THE YATTERING HAD HEARD POLO'S WIFE CONFESS ALL TO HER HUSBAND, AND THE SCENE HAD MADE IT WINC. THERE WAS THE DISTRUGHT SINNER, REGGING TO BE ACCUSED, BAWLED AT, STRUCK EVEN, AND INSTEAD OF GIVING HER THE SATISFACTION OF HIS HATRED, POLO HAD JUST SHRUGGED AND LET HER SAY HER PIECE WITHOUT A WORD OF INTERRUPTION.

SHE'D LEFT, AT LENGTH, MORE OUT OF FRUSTRATION AND SORROW THAN GUILT. SHE WAS INSULTED AT THE LACK OF HER HUSBAND'S RIGHTEOUS ANGER.

A LITTLE WHILE AFTER, SHE'D THROWN HERSELF OFF THE BALCONY OF THE ROXY CINEMA.

HER SUICIDE WAS IN SOME WAYS CONVENIENT FOR THE YATTERING. WITH THE WIFE GONE, AND THE DAUGHTERS AWAY FROM HOME, IT COULD PLAN FOR MORE ELABORATE TRICKS TO UNNERVE ITS VICTIM, WITHOUT EVER HAVING TO CONCERN ITSELF WITH REVEALING ITS PRESENCE TO CREATURES (LIKE POLO'S WIFE) THE POWERS HAD NOT MARKED FOR ATTACK.

YET THE YATTERING
WAS BOUND...



...BOUND TO THAT HOUSE, LONG NIGHT AND LONGER DAY, UNTIL HE HAD THE MAN A LUNATIC, OR AS GOOD AS.

IT WAS GOING TO BE A LENGTHY JOB, IF NOT INTERMINABLE.

YES, THERE WERE TIMES WHEN EVEN PSYCHOSOMATIC LEPROSY WOULD BE BEARABLE IF IT MEANT BEING FREE OF THIS IMPOSSIBLE MISSION.

FOR HIS PART, JACK POLO WAS THE MOST UNKNOWING OF MEN. HE HAD ALWAYS BEEN THAT WAY; INDEED HIS HISTORY WAS LITTERED WITH THE VICTIMS OF HIS NAIVETE.

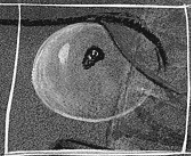
WHEN HIS LATE, LAMENTED WIFE HAD CHEATED ON HIM HE WAS THE LAST TO FIND OUT, AND THE CLUES THEY'D LEFT BEHIND THEM? A BLIND, DEAD AND DUMB MAN WOULD HAVE BECOME SUSPICIOUS.

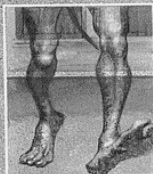
NOT JACK. HE FOTTERED ABOUT HIS DULL BUSINESS AND NEVER NOTICED THE TANG OF THE ADULTERER'S COLOGNE, NOR THE ABNORMAL REGULARITY WITH WHICH HIS WIFE CHANGED THE BED LINEN.

HE WAS NO LESS UNINTERESTED IN EVENTS WHEN HIS YOUNGER DAUGHTER AMANDA CONFESSED HER LESBIANISM TO HIM.

WELL, AS LONG AS YOU DON'T GET PREGNANT, DARLING.

WHAT CHANCE DID A FURY HAVE WITH A MAN LIKE THAT?

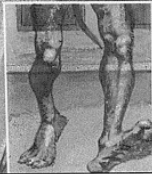




BUT THE ABSENCE OF THE WIFE LEFT THE HOUSE EMPTY DURING THE DAYS, AND THAT BECAME A BURDEN.



A BURDEN OF BOREDOM THE YATTERING FOUND SCARCELY SUPPORTABLE.



THE HOURS FROM NINE TO FIVE, ALONE IN THE HOUSE, OFTEN SEEMED ENDLESS.

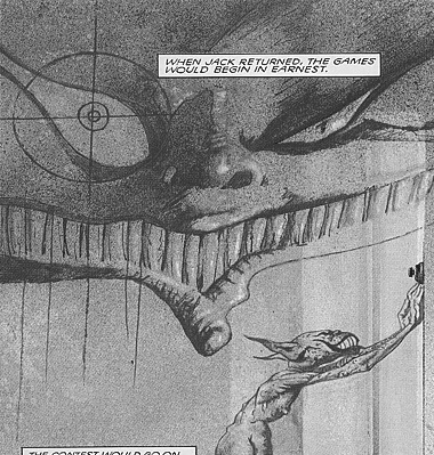
IT WOULD MOPE AND WANDER, PLANNING BIZARRE AND IMPRACTICAL REVENGES UPON THE POLO-MAN, PACING THE ROOMS, HEARTSICK, COMPANIONED ONLY BY THE CLICKS AND WHIRRS OF THE HOUSE.



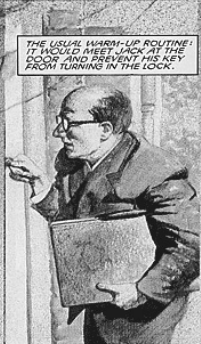
THE SITUATION RAPIDLY BECAME SO DESPERATE THAT THE MIDDAY MAIL DROP BECAME THE HIGH POINT OF THE DAY.

AN UNSHAKABLE MELANCHOLY WOULD SETTLE ON THE YATTERING IF THE POSTMAN HAD NOTHING TO DELIVER AND PASSED BY TO THE NEXT HOUSE.





WHEN JACK RETURNED, THE GAMES WOULD BEGIN IN EARNEST.



THE USUAL WARM-UP ROUTINE: IT WOULD MEET JACK AT THE DOOR AND PREVENT HIS KEY FROM TURNING IN THE LOCK.

THE CONTEST WOULD GO ON UNTIL JACK ACCIDENTALLY FOUND THE MEASURE OF THE YATTERING'S RESISTANCE, AND WON THE DAY.



SUBSIDENCE...
QUE SERA
SERA.



IN THE BATHROOM, THE YATTERING WOULD HAVE SQUEEZED TOOTHPASTE AROUND THE TOILET SEAT AND HAVE PLUGGED UP THE SHOWER HEAD WITH SOGGY TOILET PAPER.

IT WOULD EVEN SHARE THE SHOWER WITH JACK, UNSEEN, MURMURING OBSCENE SUGGESTIONS IN HIS EAR.



OF COURSE, IN A FEW CASES THE VICTIMS WOULD BE SO INFLAMED BY THESE WHISPERED SUGGESTIONS THEY'D GO OUT ON THE STREETS AND ACT UPON THEM. THEN THE VICTIM WOULD USUALLY BE ARRESTED. PRISON WOULD LEAD TO FURTHER CRIMES AND DIVINING MORAL RESERVES.

ONE WAY OR ANOTHER INSANITY WOULD WIN OUT.



EXCEPT THAT FOR SOME REASON THIS RULE DID NOT APPLY TO POLO; HE WAS UNPERTURBABLE.

THAT WAS ALWAYS SUCCESSFUL. THE DEMONS WERE TAUGHT AT THE ACADEMY. THE OBSCENITIES IN THE EAR ROUTINE NEVER FAILED TO DISTRESS CLIENTS, MAKING THEM THINK THEY WERE CONCEIVING OF THESE PERNICIOUS ACTS THEMSELVES, AND DRIVING THEM TO SELF-DISGUST, THEN TO SELF-REJECTION, AND FINALLY TO MADNESS.



INDEED, THE WAY THINGS WERE GOING THE VATTERING WOULD BE THE ONE TO BREAK.

IT WAS TIRED; SO VERY TIRED.

A black and white photograph showing a large, long-haired cat lying on its side. A small kitten is curled up and resting on the cat's back, near its head. The cat's fur is thick and textured, and the kitten is much smaller and also has some fur. The background is a plain, light-colored surface.

LATELY, IT HAD DEVELOPED A PASSION FOR THE WOMAN WHO LIVED ACROSS THE STREET FROM POLO.

SHE WAS A YOUNG WIDOW, AND SEEMED TO SPEND MOST OF HER LIFE PARADING AROUND THE HOUSE STARK NAKED.

IT WAS ALMOST UNBEARABLE SOMETIMES, WATCHING THE WOMAN AND KNOWING IT COULD NEVER CROSS THE THRESHOLD OF POLO'S HOUSE.

THIS WAS THE LAW.

IT WAS ALMOST UNBEARABLE SOMETIMES, WATCHING THE WOMAN AND KNOWING IT COULD NEVER CROSS THE THRESHOLD OF POLO'S HOUSE.

10

THE LAW.

THE YATTERING WAS A MINOR DEMON, AND HIS SOUL CATCHING WAS STRICTLY CONFINED TO THE PERIMETERS OF THE VICTIM'S HOUSE. TO STEP OUTSIDE WAS TO RELINQUISH ALL POWERS OVER THE VICTIM! TO PUT ITSELF AT THE MERCY OF HUMANITY.



THE YATTERING WEPT.

THE YATTERING SCREAMED.



IN A FIT OF UNCONTROLLABLE ANGUISH, IT BOILED THE WATER IN THE AQUARIUM, ROACHING THE GOLDFISH.



ALL JUNE, ALL JULY AND MOST OF AUGUST, IT SWEATED IN ITS PRISON; ALL THROUGH THOSE HOT MONTHS JACK POLO MAINTAINED COMPLETE INDIFFERENCE TO THE YATTERING'S ATTACKS.

IT WAS DEEPLY EMBARRASSING, AND IT WAS GRADUALLY DESTROYING THE DEMON'S SELF-CONFIDENCE. SEEING THIS BLIND VICTIM SURVIVE EVERY TRIAL AND TRICK ATTEMPTED ON HIM.



POLO HEARD NOTHING. SAW NOTHING.

AT LAST, IN LATE SEPTEMBER, THE YATTERING BROKE ONE OF THE FIRST RULES OF ITS CONDITION, AND APPEARED DIRECTLY TO ITS MASTERS.



AUTUMN IS HELL'S SEASON, AND THE DEMONS OF HIGHER DENOMINATIONS WERE FEELING BENIGN. THEY CONDESCENDED TO SPEAK TO THEIR CREATURE.

WHAT DO YOU WANT?

IT WAS BEELZEBUB, HIS VOICE BLACKENING THE AIR IN THE LOUNGE.

THIS MAN...

YES?

THIS POLO...

YES?

I AM NOT WITHOUT ISSUE UPON HIM. I CAN'T GET PANIC UPON HIM, I CAN'T BREED FEAR OR EVEN MILD CONCERN UPON HIM. I AM STERILE, LORD OF THE FLIES, AND I WISH TO BE PUT OUT OF MY MISERY.

YOU WANT WHAT?

I... WANT TO DIE.

YOU CANNOT DIE.

FROM THIS WORLD. JUST DIE FROM THIS WORLD. FADE AWAY. BE REPLACED.

*You
Will Not
Die!*

BUT
I CAN'T
BREAK
HIM.

YOU
MUST.

WHY?

BECAUSE
WE TELL
YOU TO.

BEELZEBUB ALWAYS USED
THE ROYAL "WE," THOUGH HE
WAS UNQUALIFIED TO DO SO.

LET ME
AT LEAST KNOW
WHY I'M IN THIS
HOUSE. WHAT IS HE?
NOTHING! HE IS
NOTHING!

BEELZEBUB FOUND THIS
RICH. HE LAUGHED,
BUZZED, TRUMPETED.

JACK
JOHNSON POLO IS
THE CHILD OF A
WORSHIPPER AT THE
CHURCH OF LOST
SAVATION. HE
BELONGS
TO US.

BUT WHY
SHOULD YOU
WANT HIM?
HE'S SO
DULL.



WE WANT HIM
BECAUSE HIS SOUL WAS
PROMISED TO US, AND
HIS MOTHER DID NOT DELIVER
IT, OR HERSELF. SHE CHEATED
US. SHE DIED IN THE ARMS
OF A PRIEST, AND WAS
SAFELY EXORTED
TO...

THE WORD THAT FOLLOWED
WAS ANATHEMA. THE LORD
OF THE FLIES COULD BARELY
BRING HIMSELF TO
PRONOUNCE IT.

... HEAVEN.

INFINITE LOSS WAS IN
THE LORD'S VOICE.



HEAVEN.

THE YATTERING DID NOT QUITE KNOW WHAT WAS MEANT BY THE WORD.

POLO IS TO BE HOUNDED IN THE NAME OF THE OLD ONE AND PUNISHED FOR HIS CRIMES. NO TORTURE IS TOO PROFOUND FOR A FAMILY THAT HAS CHEATED US.

I'M TIRED.
PLEASE, I
BEG YOU.

CLAIM
THAT MAN!
OR YOU WILL
SUFFER
IN HIS
PLACE!

WHERE
IS YOUR
PRIDE?

PRIDE,
YATTERING,
PRIDE.

THEN HE WAS GONE.
THE LORD HAD SPOKEN.



IF ONLY THE LAW ALLOWED
SUCH CRUELTY TO BE VISITED
UPON HUMAN FLESH.



IF ONLY, IF ONLY, THEN IT WOULD MAKE
POLO SUFFER SUCH TORMENTS. BUT NO.
THE YATTERING KNEW THE LAWS AS WELL
AS THE BACK OF ITS HAND; THEY HAD
BEEN FLAYED ONTO ITS CORTEX AS A
FLEDGLING DEMON BY ITS TEACHERS.

AND LAW ONE STATED: "THOU SHALT
NOT LAY PALM UPON THY VICTIMS."

IT HAD NEVER BEEN TOLD WHY THIS
LAW PERTAINED, BUT IT DID.

"THOU
SHALT
NOT..."





SO THE WHOLE PAINFUL PROCESS CONTINUED, DAY IN, DAY OUT, AND STILL THE MAN SHOWED NO SIGN OF YIELDING.

POLO BROUGHT HOME A NEW CAT TO REPLACE HIS TREASURED FREDDY (NOW ASH).



THE FIRST OF THESE POOR VICTIMS THE YATTERING DROWNED.

IT WAS A PETTY SATISFACTION TO SEE THE LOOK OF DISTASTE REGISTER ON POLO'S FACE AS HE UNZIPPED HIS PANTS....



... BUT A SATISFACTION IT WAS.



BUT ANY PLEASURE THE YATTERING TOOK IN JACK'S DISCOMFORTURE WAS CANCELLED OUT BY THE BLITHELY EFFICIENT WAY IN WHICH THE MAN DEALT WITH THE DEAD CAT, HOISTING THE BUNDLE OF SOAKING FUR OUT OF THE BOWL, WRAPPING IT IN A TOWEL....

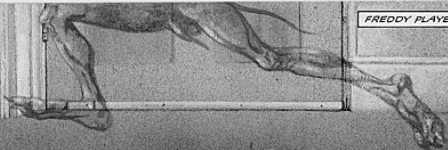


... AND BURYING IT WITH SCARCELY A MURMUR.

THE THIRD CAT THAT POLO BROUGHT HOME WAS WISE TO THE INVISIBLE PRESENCE OF THE DEMON FROM THE START.

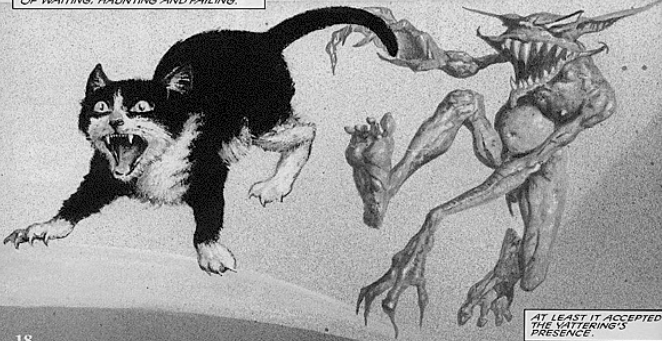


THIS WAS INDEED AN ENTERTAINING WEEK IN MID-NOVEMBER. LIFE FOR THE VATTERING BECAME ALMOST INTERESTING WHEN IT PLAYED CAT AND MOUSE WITH FREDDY III.



FREDDY PLAYED THE MOUSE.

CATS NOT BEING ESPECIALLY BRIGHT ANIMALS THE GAME WAS SCARCELY A GREAT INTELLECTUAL CHALLENGE. BUT IT MADE A CHANGE IN THE ENDLESS DAYS OF WAITING, HAUNTING AND FAILING.



AT LEAST IT ACCEPTED THE VATTERING'S PRESENCE.

EVENTUALLY, HOWEVER, IN A FILTHY MOOD (CAUSED BY THE REMARRIAGE OF THE YATTERING'S NAKED WIDOW) THE DEMON LOST ITS TEMPER WITH THE CAT.

IT WAS SHARPENING ITS NAILS ON THE NYLON CARPET, CLAWING AND SCRATCHING AT THE PILE FOR HOURS ON END.



THE NOISE PUT THE DEMON'S METAPHYSICAL TEETH ON EDGE. SCRATCHING AND CLAWING. SCRATCHING AND CLAWING.

Scratch

Scratch

Scratch

Scratch
Scratch

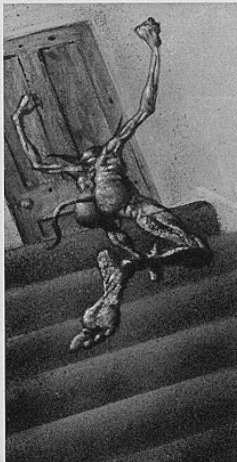
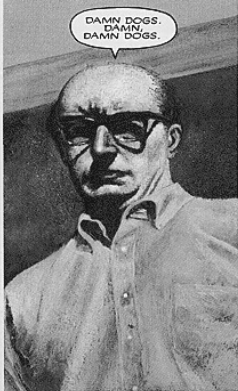
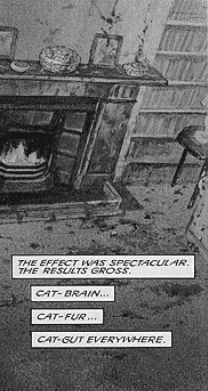
Scratch

Scratch

Scratch

Scratch







THE DEMON WAS UTTERLY STUMPED. IF THE MAN COULD NOT RAISE MORE THAN A FLICKER OF CONCERN WHEN HIS CAT EXPLODED IN THE LIVING ROOM, WHAT CHANCE HAD IT GOT OF EVER BREAKING THE BASTARD?

THERE WAS ONE LAST OPPORTUNITY.

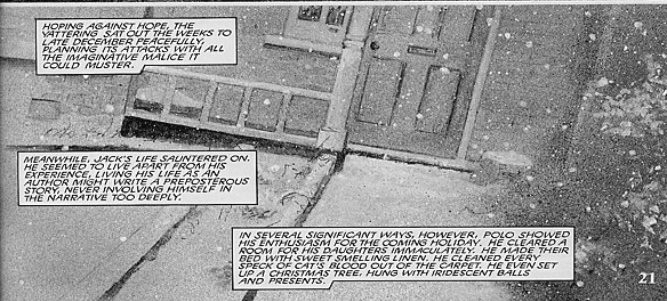
IT WAS APPROACHING CHRIST'S MASS, AND JACK'S CHILDREN WOULD BE COMING HOME TO THE BOSOM OF THE FAMILY. PERHAPS THEY COULD CONVINCE HIM THAT ALL WAS NOT WELL WITH THE WORLD! PERHAPS THEY COULD GET THEIR FINGERNAILS UNDER HIS FLAWLESS INDIFFERENCE, AND BEGIN TO BREAK HIM DOWN.



YES, PERHAPS.

HOPING AGAINST HOPE, THE YATTERING SAT OUT THE WEEKS TO LATE DECEMBER PEACEFULLY, PLANNING ITS ATTACKS WITH ALL THE IMAGINATIVE MALICE IT COULD MUSTER.

MEANWHILE, JACK'S LIFE SAUNTERED ON. HE SEEMED TO LIVE APART FROM HIS EXPERIENCE, LIVING HIS LIFE AS AN AUTHOR MIGHT WRITE A PREPOSTEROUS STORY, NEVER INVOLVING HIMSELF IN THE NARRATIVE TOO DEEPLY.

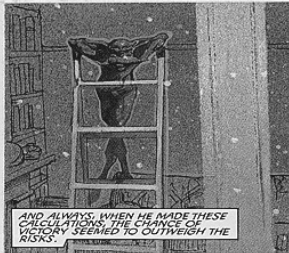


IN SEVERAL SIGNIFICANT WAYS, HOWEVER, POLO SHOWED HIS ENTHUSIASM FOR THE COMING HOLIDAY. HE CLEARED A ROOM FOR HIS DAUGHTERS IMMACULATLY. HE MADE THEIR BED WITH SWEET SMELLING LINEN. HE CLEANED EVERY SPECK OF CAT'S BLOOD OUT OF THE CARPET. HE EVEN SET UP A CHRISTMAS TREE, HUNG WITH IRIDESCENT BALLS AND PRESENTS.



ONCE IN A WHILE, AS HE WENT ABOUT THE PREPARATIONS, JACK THOUGHT OF THE GAME HE WAS PLAYING, AND QUIETLY CALCULATED THE ODDS AGAINST HIM.

IN THE DAYS TO COME HE WOULD HAVE TO MEASURE NOT ONLY HIS OWN SUFFERING, BUT THAT OF HIS DAUGHTERS, AGAINST THE POSSIBLE VICTORY.

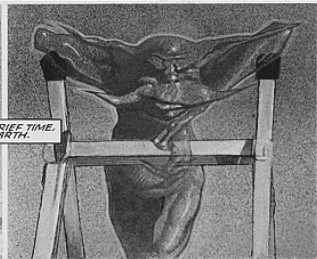


AND ALWAYS, WHEN HE MADE THESE CALCULATIONS, THE CHANCE OF VICTORY SEEMED TO OUTWEIGH THE RISKS.



SO HE CONTINUED TO WRITE HIS LIFE, AND WAITED.

IT WAS POSSIBLE, FOR A BRIEF TIME, TO BELIEVE IN PEACE ON EARTH.



LATE IN THE EVENING OF THE TWENTY-THIRD OF DECEMBER THE DAUGHTERS ARRIVED IN A FLURRY OF CASES AND KISSES.

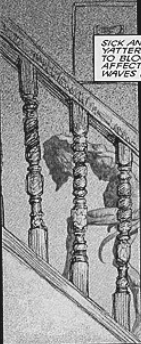
FROM ITS VANTAGE POINT ON THE LANDING THE YATTERING VIEWED THE YOUNG WOMEN BALEFULLY.

THE YOUNGEST, AMANDA, DIDN'T LOOK LIKE IDEAL MATERIAL IN WHICH TO INDUCE A BREAK-DOWN. IN FACT, SHE LOOKED DANGEROUS.

GINA FOLLOWED. A SMOOTHLY POLISHED WOMAN OF THE WORLD AND TWENTY-FOUR, SHE LOOKED EVERY BIT AS INTIMIDATING AS HER YOUNGER SISTER.

WITHIN THE SPACE OF A FEW HOURS THE DRAB HOUSE WAS REPAINTED WITH LIGHT, AND FUN, AND LOVE.

IT MADE THE YATTERING SICK.



SICK AND WHIMPERING, THE YATTERING RAN TO THE ATTIC TO BLOCK OUT THE DIN OF AFFECTION, BUT THE SHOCK-WAVES ENVELOPED IT.



ALL IT COULD DO WAS HIDE, AND LISTEN, AND REFINED ITS REVENGE.

JACK WAS PLEASED TO HAVE HIS BEAUTIES HOME, AMANDA SO FULL OF OPINIONS, AND SO STRONG, LIKE HER MOTHER, GINA MORE LIKE HIS MOTHER: POISED, PERCEPTIVE.

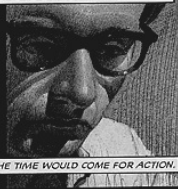
HE WAS SO HAPPY IN THEIR PRESENCE HE COULD HAVE WEPT; AND HERE HE WAS, THE PROUD FATHER, PUTTING THEM BOTH AT SUCH RISK.

BUT WHAT WAS THE ALTERNATIVE? IF HE HAD CANCELLED THE CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS, IT WOULD HAVE LOOKED HIGHLY SUSPICIOUS.

NO: HE MUST SIT TIGHT, PLAY DUMB, THE WAY THE ENEMY HAD COME TO EXPECT HIM TO BE.



IT MIGHT EVEN HAVE SPOILED HIS WHOLE STRATEGY, WAKENING THE ENEMY TO THE TRICK THAT WAS BEING PLAYED.



THE TIME WOULD COME FOR ACTION.

AT 3:15 ON CHRISTMAS MORNING
THE YATTERING OPENED HOSTILITIES.

A PALTRY
PERFORMANCE
AT BEST, BUT
IT HAD THE
INTENDED
EFFECT.

GINA.

HMM...HMM...

GINA!

WHAT?

THERE'S
SOMEBODY
UNDER THE
BED.

THERE'S
NOTHING
THERE--

THERE'S
SOMETHING
IN THE ROOM
WITH
US, GINA. I'M
SURE OF IT.

NO. IT'S
EMPTY.

WHAT'S ALL THE NOISE?

THERE'S SOMETHING IN THE HOUSE, DADDY. I WAS THROWN OUT OF BED.

THIS WAS THE FIRST TEST: HE MUST LIE AS CASUALLY AS POSSIBLE.

LOOKS LIKE YOU'VE BEEN HAVING NIGHTMARES, BEAUTY.

THERE WAS SOMETHING UNDER THE BED.

THERE'S NOBODY HERE NOW.

BUT I FELT IT.

WELL, I'LL CHECK THE REST OF THE HOUSE. YOU TWO STAY HERE, JUST IN CASE.

SUBSIDENCE.

POLO WAS QUIETLY SATISFIED THAT THE BATTLE HAD BEEN JOINED IN SUCH A PETTY MANNER. HE'D HALF-FEARED THAT THE ENEMY WOULD TURN SAVAGE WITH SUCH TENDER VICTIMS AT HAND.

BUT NO; HE'D JUDGED THE MIND OF THE CREATURE QUITE ACCURATELY.

IT WAS ONE OF THE LOWER ORDERS. POWERFUL, BUT SLOW. CAPABLE OF BEING INVEIGLED BEYOND THE LIMITS OF ITS CONTROL.

HE TRAIPSED THROUGH THE ENTIRE HOUSE SEARCHING DUTIFULLY, THEN RETURNED TO HIS DAUGHTERS.



AMANDA LOOKED SMALL AND PALE, NOT THE TWENTY-TWO YEAR OLD WOMAN SHE WAS, BUT A CHILD AGAIN.

NOTHING DOING, IT'S CHRISTMAS MORNING AND ALL THROUGH THE HOUSE--



NOTHING WAS STIRRING; NOT EVEN A MOUSE.

NOT EVEN A MOUSE, BEAUTY.



SHIT.

HE NEEDED SOME SLEEP, BUT QUITE CLEARLY THE YATTERING HAD NO INTENTION OF LETTING THEM ALONE JUST YET.





ONE
SUCK
SERV.

THE HOUSE
IS SINKING A
LITTLE ON THE
LEFT SIDE, YOU
KNOW, IT HAS
BEEN FOR
YEARS.

SUBSIDENCE...
WOULD NOT
THROW ME OUT
OF BED.

WELL,
MAYBE IT
WAS SANTA
CLAUS.

WHAT ELSE
CAN IT BE? THE
ONLY OTHER
EXPLANA-
TION...

...THE ONLY
OTHER POSSIBLE
EXPLANATION IS
TOO PREPOSTEROUS
FOR WORDS.

POLO WAS ALMOST ELATED BY
SKIMMING SO CLOSE TO THE TRUTH.



IT WAS AN EXQUISITE IRONY, DENYING
THE EXISTENCE OF THE INVISIBLE WORLD
IN THE FULL KNOWLEDGE THAT EVEN
NOW IT BREATHED VENGEFULLY
DOWN HIS NECK.

YOU MEAN
POLTERGEIST?

I MEAN ANY-
THING THAT GOES
BANG IN THE NIGHT,
BUT WE'RE GROWN-
UP PEOPLE, AREN'T
WE? WE DON'T
BELIEVE IN
BOGEYMEN.

NO, I DON'T, BUT
I DON'T BELIEVE THE
HOUSE IS SUBSIDING,
EITHER.



WELL, IT'LL
HAVE TO DO FOR
NOW; CHRISTMAS
STARTS HERE. WE
DON'T WANT TO SPOIL
IT TALKING ABOUT
GREMLINS,
NOW DO WE?



GREMLIN THAT
SURELY BIT DEEP.
TO CALL A
HELL-SPAWN
A GREMLIN.

THERE WOULD BE TIME
YET TO BEAT THAT
ATHEISTIC SMILE OFF
JACK POLO'S SMOOTH,
FAT FACE. TIME
A PLenty, NO HALF-
MEASURES FROM
NOW ON. NO
SUBTLETY. IT WOULD
BE AN ALL-OUT
ATTACK.

LET THERE BE BLOOD.
LET THERE BE AGONY.

THEY'D ALL BREAK.

CHRISTMAS.

THROUGH THE HOUSE DRIFTED THE SOUND OF NINA'S COLLEGE CHOIR, "O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM, HOW STILL WE SEE THEE LIE..."



THE PRESENTS HAD BEEN OPENED, THE G AND T'S WERE BEING DOWNED, THE HOUSE WAS ONE WARM EMBRACE FROM ROOF TO CELLAR.

A SUDDEN CHILL PERMEATED THE HEAT AND STEAM, MAKING AMANDA SHIVER.

MAYBE SHE WAS CATCHING SOMETHING.

SHE FELT THE STARE QUITE CLEARLY. SHE TURNED.

NOBODY. NOTHING.

THEN, A NOISE. A BEATING OF SOMEBODY'S FISTS AGAINST THE DOOR.

... BIRD.

IT WAS COMING FROM THE OVEN.

AMANDA CONTINUED TO WASH THE BRUSSELS SPROUTS, CUTTING INTO ONE WITH A WORM CURLED IN THE MIDDLE. SHE DROWNED IT.

THE CHOIR SANG ON.

IN THE LIVING ROOM, JACK WAS LAUGHING WITH GINA ABOUT SOMETHING.

LIKE SOMETHING LOCKED IN ONE OF THE CUPBOARDS, DESPERATE TO ESCAPE. A CAT CAUGHT IN A BOX, OR A ...

SKRKK

AMANDA'S STOMACH
TURNED, AS SHE BEGAN
TO IMAGINE THE WORST.
HAD SHE LOCKED SOME-
THING IN THE OVEN WHEN
SHE PUT IN THE TURKEY?

KA-TUMP
KA-TUNK

SHE HAD VISIONS OF A
BASTED CAT LEAPING
OUT AT HER, ITS FLUR
BURNED OFF, ITS FLESH
HALF-COOKED.

THERE'S
SOME-
THING
IN THE
OVEN.

AS IF HE NEEDED TO BE TOLD,
THE OVEN WAS IN A FRENZY.

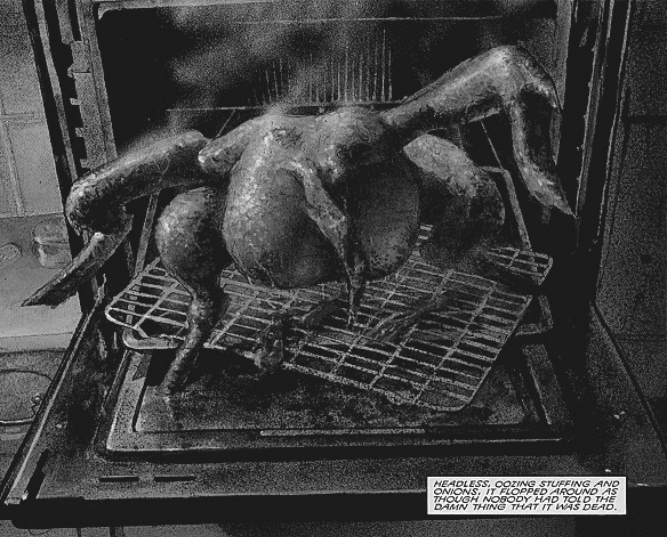
KA-SPING
KA-SPANG

THIS WAS NEW, THOUGHT
POLO, YOU'RE BETTER
THAN I JUDGED YOU TO
BE. THIS IS CLEVER. THIS
IS ORIGINAL.



THE HANDLE WAS SLIPPERY
WITH HEAT AND GREASE.



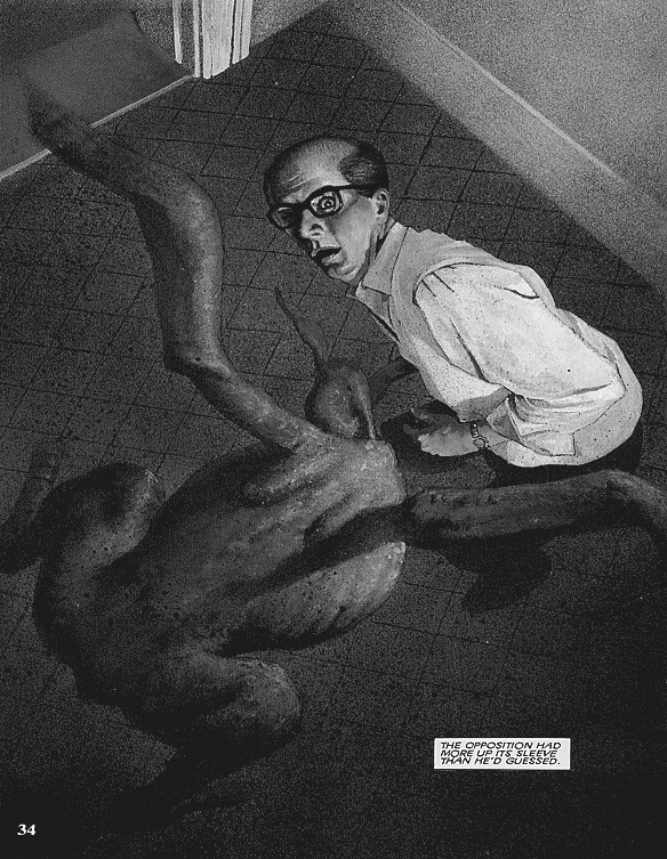


HEADLESS, OZING STUFFING AND ONIONS, IT FLOPPED AROUND ITS TAIL. NOBODY HAD TOLD THE DAMN THING THAT IT WAS DEAD.

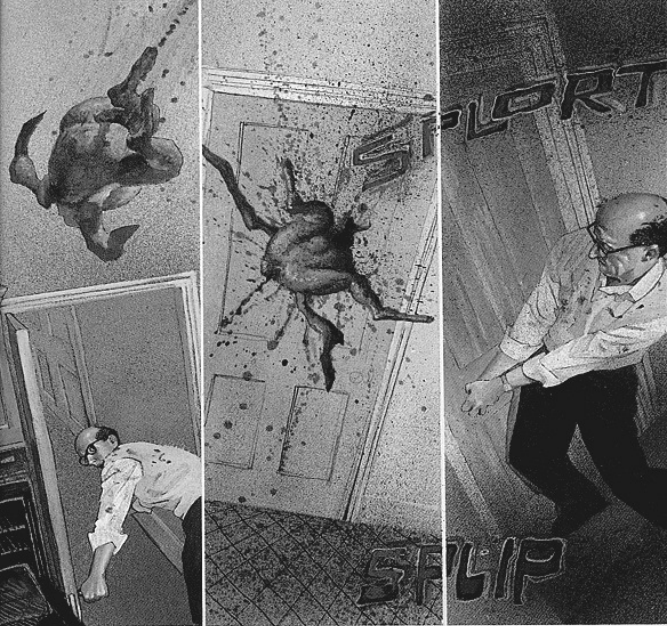




JACK CURSED HIS CONFIDENCE.



THE OPPOSITION HAD
MORE UP ITS SLEEVE
THAN HE'D GUESSED.





HER FATHER KNEW WHAT WAS GOING ON IN THE HOUSE, BUT HE WAS REFUSING TO COUGH UP FOR SOME REASON.

WHO DO I CALL—THE POLICE OR AN EXORCIST?



NEITHER.

FOR GOD'S SAKE...



THE RADIO WAS STILL CROONING CAROLS WHICH SLOTTED OUT THE NOISE OF THE BIRD, BUT THEIR PROMISES OF GOOD-WILL SEEMED SMALL COMFORT.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT IT WAS.

WHAT WAS THAT?

MASS HYSTERIA?



GINA'S DISPLEASURE WAS PLAIN. HER FATHER HAD A SECRET.



THERE'S NOTHING GOING ON, GINA. REALLY.

THIS WAS WAR.

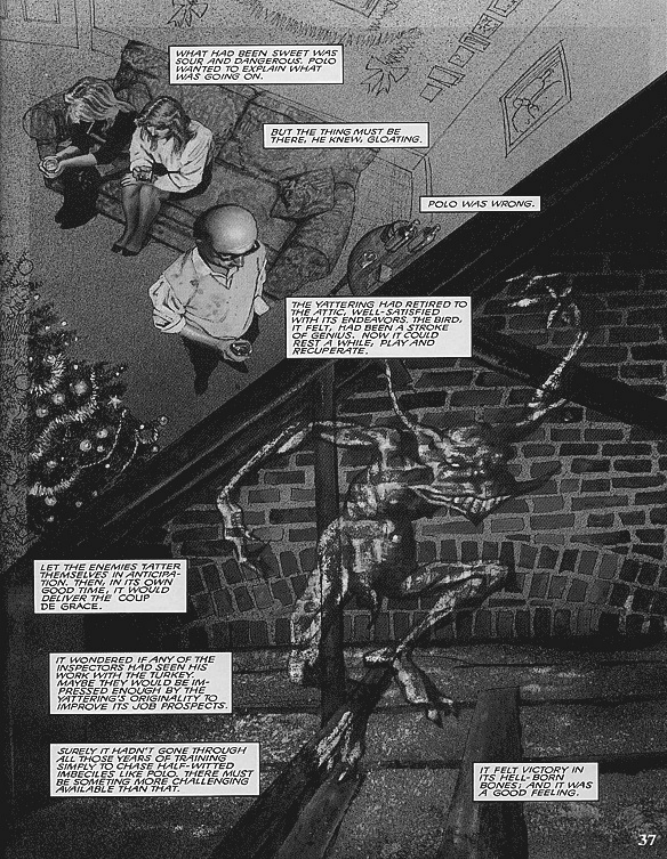
JACK WAS AFRAID.



THE HOUSE WAS SUDDENLY A PRISON. THE GAME WAS SUDDENLY LETHAL. THE ENEMY, INSTEAD OF PLAYING FOOLISH GAMES, MEANT HARM.

REAL HARM TO THEM ALL.

THE CAROLS ON THE RADIO HAD WITHERED INTO A SERMON ON GOD'S BENEDICTIONS.



WHAT HAD BEEN SWEET WAS SOUR AND DANGEROUS. POLO WANTED TO EXPLAIN WHAT WAS GOING ON.

BUT THE THING MUST BE THERE, HE KNEW, GLOATING.

POLO WAS WRONG.

THE YATTERING HAD RETIRED TO THE ATTIC, WELL-SATISFIED WITH ITS ENDEAVORS. THE BIRD, IT FELT, HAD BEEN A STROKE OF GENIUS. NOW IT COULD REST A WHILE, PLAY AND RECUPERATE.

LET THE ENEMIES YATTER THEMSELVES IN ANTICIPATION. THEN, IN ITS OWN GOOD TIME, IT WOULD DELIVER THE COUP DE GRACE.

IT WONDERED IF ANY OF THE INSPECTORS HAD SEEN HIS WORK WITH THE TURKEY. MAYBE THEY WOULD BE IMPRESSED ENOUGH BY THE YATTERING'S ORIGINALITY TO IMPROVE ITS JOB PROSPECTS.

SURELY IT HADN'T GONE THROUGH ALL THOSE YEARS OF TRAINING SIMPLY TO CHASE HALF-WITTED IMBECILES LIKE POLO. THERE MUST BE SOMETHING MORE CHALLENGING AVAILABLE THAN THAT.

IT FELT VICTORY IN ITS HELL-BORN BONES. AND IT WAS A GOOD FEELING.



THE PURSUIT OF POLO WOULD SURELY GAIN MOMENTUM NOW, HIS DAUGHTERS WOULD CONVINCE HIM THAT THERE WAS SOMETHING TERRIBLE AFOOT.

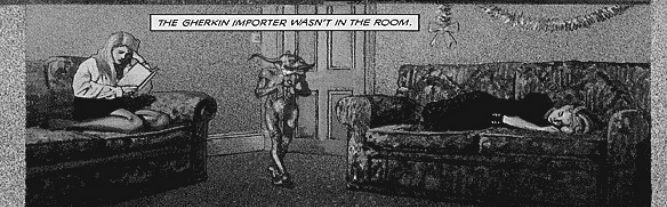
HE WOULD CRACK.
HE WOULD CRUMBLE.

MAYBE HE'D GO CLASSICALLY MAD: TEAR OUT HIS HAIR, RIP OFF HIS CLOTHES, SMEAR HIMSELF WITH HIS OWN EXCREMENT.



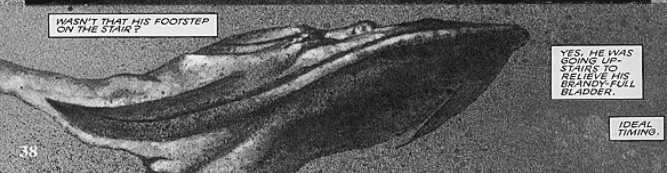
OH YES, VICTORY WAS CLOSE, AND WOULDN'T ITS MASTERS BE LOVING, THEN? WOULDN'T IT BE SHOWERED WITH PRAISE AND POWER?

ONE MORE MANIFESTATION WAS ALL THAT WAS REQUIRED, ONE FINAL, INSPIRED INTERVENTION, AND POLO WOULD BE SO MUCH BLUBBERING FLESH.



THE GHERKIN IMPORTER WASN'T IN THE ROOM.

WASN'T THAT HIS FOOTSTEP ON THE STAIR?



YES, HE WAS GOING UPSTAIRS TO RELIEVE HIS BRANDY-FULL BLADDER.

IDEAL
TIMING.



IN HER SLEEP AMANDA DREAMED
SOMETHING DARK FLITTING ACROSS
HER VISION. SOMETHING MALIGN;
SOMETHING THAT TASTED BITTER IN
HER MOUTH.



THE SILVER BALLS ON
THE TREE WERE
ROCKING GENTLY.
NOT JUST THE BALLS,
THE TINGEL AND THE
BRANCHES TOO.



TIN
THE TREE BEGAN TO SPIN.



CHRIST...
JESUS
CHRIST.

THE TREE PICKED
UP MOMENTUM.



FATHER!



POLO BURST INTO THE LIVING ROOM HALF-EXPECTING ALL THE HOSTS OF HELL TO BE THERE, DOG-HEADED, DANCING WITH HIS BEAUTIES.

BUT NO. IT WAS THE TREE THAT WAS WHINING, WHINING LIKE A PACK OF DOGS, AS IT SPUN AND SPUN.

THE AIR STANK OF SINGED PLASTIC AND PINE-SAP.



GET OUT OF HERE!



COME ON...
GET OUT!



THE FOKERS BESIDE THE FIRE. THE CUSHIONS. THE ORNAMENTS. EACH OBJECT ADDED ITS OWN SINGULAR NOTE TO THE ORCHESTRATION OF WHINES, WHICH WERE BUILDING UP, SECOND BY SECOND, TO A DEAFENING PITCH.



JACK COULD SEE THE ENEMY. IN HIS MIND'S EYE, RACING BETWEEN THE OBJECTS LIKE A JUGGLER, SPINNING PLATES ON A STICK, TRYING TO KEEP THEM ALL MOVING AT ONCE. IT MUST BE EXHAUSTING WORK, HE THOUGHT. THE DEMON WAS PROBABLY CLOSE TO COLLAPSE. IT COULDN'T BE THINKING STRAIGHT, OVER-EXCITED, IMPULSIVE... VULNERABLE.

THIS MUST BE THE MOMENT, IF EVER THERE WAS A MOMENT, TO JOIN BATTLE. AT LAST, TO FACE THE THING, DEEF IT, AND TRAP IT.



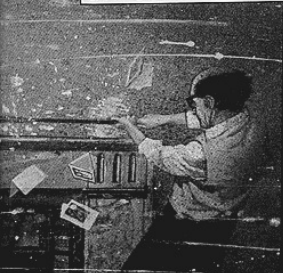
FOR ITS PART, THE
VATTERING WAS ENJOYING
THE ORGY OF DESTRUCTION.
IT FLUNG EVERY MOVABLE
OBJECT INTO THE FRAY, SET
EVERYTHING SPINNING. IT
WATCHED WITH SATISFACTION

SURELY HE WAS NEARLY
MAD, WASN'T HE?



LIKE A MAN IN A CLOUD OF LOCUST POLO RAN AROUND THE ROOM, BRINGING DOWN HIS FAVORITE BOOKS IN A WELTER OF FLUTTERING PAGES...

... SMASHING WHIRLING DRESDEN, SHATTERING LAMPS. A LITTER OF BROKEN POSSESSIONS SWAMPED THE FLOOR, SOME OF IT TWITCHING AS LIFE WENT OUT OF THE FRAGMENTS. BUT, FOR EVERY OBJECT BROUGHT DOWN, THERE WERE A DOZEN STILL SPINNING, STILL WHINING.



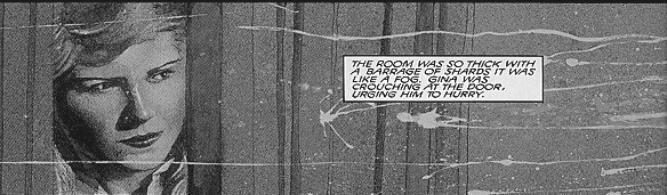
POLO COULD HEAR GINA AT THE DOOR, YELLING TO HIM TO GET OUT, TO LEAVE IT ALONE.

BUT IT WAS SO ENJOYABLE, PLAYING AGAINST THE ENEMY MORE DIRECTLY THAN HE'D EVER ALLOWED HIMSELF BEFORE. HE DIDN'T WANT TO GIVE UP. HE WANTED THE DEMON TO SHOW ITSELF, TO BE KNOWN, TO BE RECOGNIZED.

HE WANTED CONFIRMATION WITH THE OLD ONE'S EMISSARY ONCE AND FOR ALL.

THEN THE TREE EXPLODED.





THE ROOM WAS SO THICK WITH A BARRAGE OF SHARDS IT WAS LIKE A FOG. GINA WAS CROUCHING AT THE DOOR, URGING HIM TO HURRY.



AS JACK REACHED THE DOOR, AND FELT GINA'S ARMS AROUND HIM, HE SWORE HE COULD HEAR LAUGHTER FROM THE LIVING ROOM. TANGIBLE, AUDIBLE LAUGHTER, RICH AND SATISFIED.



WHAT IS IT?

POLTERGEIST? GHOST?

MOTHER'S GHOST?!

THE THOUGHT OF HIS DEAD
WIFE BEING RESPONSIBLE
FOR SUCH WHOLESALE
DESTRUCTION STRUCK
HIM AS FUNNY.

AMANDA WAS HALF
SMILING. GOOD, HE
THOUGHT, SHE'S
COMING OUT OF IT.



THEN HE MET THE
VACANT LOOK IN HER
EYES AND THE TRUTH
DAWNED. SHE'D
BROKEN. HER SANITY
HAD TAKEN REFUGE
WHERE THIS
FANTASTIQUE
COULDN'T GET AT IT.

WHAT'S IN
THERE?!



I DON'T
KNOW.

YOU DO
KNOW.

NO.



YOU'RE
LYING.

I THINK...



I THINK...
I SHALL GO
FOR A
WALK.

THE AIR IN THE HALLWAY WAS ELECTRIC WITH UNSEEN PRESENCES. IT WAS VERY CLOSE TO HIM, INVISIBLE AS EVER, BUT CLOSE.

THIS WAS THE MOST DANGEROUS TIME. HE MUSTN'T LOSE HIS NERVE NOW. HE MUST WALK AS THOUGH NOTHING HAD HAPPENED; HE MUST LEAVE AMANDA BE, LEAVE EXPLANATIONS UNTIL IT WAS ALL OVER AND DONE.



WALK
???!!

YES...
WALK...
I NEED
SOME
FRESH
AIR.

YOU
CAN'T
LEAVE US
HERE.



I'LL FIND
SOMEBODY
TO HELP US
CLEAR UP.

BUT
MANDY...!



SHE'LL
GET OVER
IT. LEAVE
HER BE.

THAT WAS HARD. THAT WAS
ALMOST UNFORGIVABLE;
BUT IT WAS SAID NOW.

YOU CAN'T
JUST LEAVE!
ARE YOU OUT
OF YOUR
MIND?

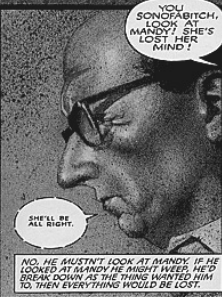
I NEED THE
AIR. I'LL JUST
GO FOR A
MOMENT.





IT WAS WITH HIM, POLO
COULD FEEL IT. SO
ANGRY NOW, SO
READY TO TWIST OFF
HIS HEAD.

EXCEPT THAT IT WASN'T
ALLOWED, EVER, TO TOUCH
HIM. BUT POLO COULD
FEEL ITS RESENTMENT LIKE
A PHYSICAL PRESENCE.



YOU
SONOFABITCH,
LOOK AT
MANDY! SHE'S
LOST HER
MIND!

SHE'LL BE
ALL RIGHT.

NO. HE MUSTN'T LOOK AT MANDY. IF HE
LOOKED AT MANDY HE MIGHT WEEP. HE'D
BREAK DOWN AS THE THING WANTED HIM
TO, THEN EVERYTHING WOULD BE LOST.



POLO REACHED FOR THE DOOR
KNOB. THE DEMON BOLTED THE
DOOR QUICKLY, LOUDLY. NO
TEMPER LEFT FOR PRETENSE
NOW.



JACK, KEEPING HIS MOVE-
MENTS AS EVEN AS POSSIBLE,
UNBOLTED THE DOOR.

IT WAS THRILLING, THIS
GAME; IT WAS ALSO
TERRIFYING. IF HE PUSHED
TOO FAR SURELY THE
DEMON'S FRUSTRATION
WOULD OVERRIDE ITS
LESSONS.



JACK WONDERED HOW
LONG HE COULD KEEP
THIS UP FOR. SOMEHOW
HE HAD TO GET OUTSIDE;
HE HAD TO COAX IT OVER
THE THRESHOLD. ONE
STEP WAS ALL THE LAW
REQUIRED, ACCORDING TO
HIS RESEARCHES.



ONE
SIMPLE
STEP.

UNBOLTED.
BOLTED.
UNBOLTED.
BOLTED.

GINA DIDN'T UNDERSTAND WHAT SHE WAS SEEING, BUT IT WAS OBVIOUS HER FATHER WAS DOING BATTLE WITH SOMEONE, OR SOMETHING.

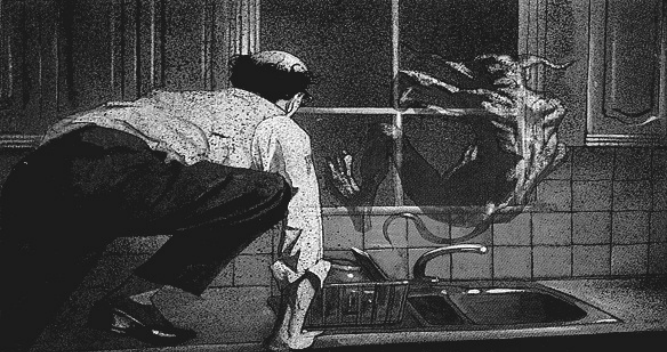
DADDY...

SHUT UP.

INEXPLICABLY, SHE RETURNED THE SMILE. IT WAS GRIM, BUT GENUINE. WHATEVER WAS AT ISSUE HERE, SHE LOVED HIM.

POLO MADE A BREAK FOR THE BACK DOOR.







IT AVOIDED A COLLISION
ONLY BY THE MOST
BALLETIC OF MANEUVERS.

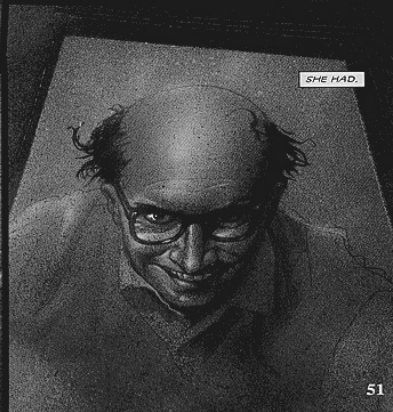


THAT WOULD BE FATAL INDEED;
TO TOUCH THE MAN IN THE
HEAT OF THE MOMENT.



WISE TO HER FATHER'S
STRATEGY, GINA HAD UNBOLTED
THE DOOR WHILE THE YATTERING
AND JACK FOUGHT AT THE
BACK DOOR.

JACK HAD PRAYED
SHE'D TAKE THE
OPPORTUNITY.



SHE HAD.

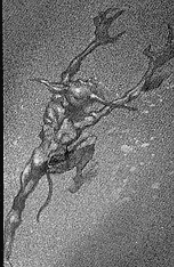


ALL THE CREATURE WANTED AT THAT MOMENT, BEYOND ANY OTHER DREAM, WAS TO TAKE THIS HUMAN'S SKULL BETWEEN ITS PALMS AND MAKE NON-SENSE OF IT, CRUSH IT TO SMITHEREENS, AND POUR THE HOT THOUGHT OUT ONTO THE SNOW. TO BE DONE WITH JACK J. POLO, FOREVER, AND EVER.

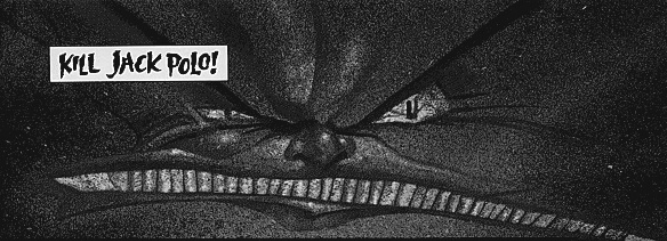
WAS THAT SO MUCH TO ASK?



ESCAPING. ESCAPING.



THE YATTERING HOWLED, FORGETTING ITS YEARS OF TRAINING. EVERY LESSON IT HAD LEARNED, EVERY RULE OF BATTLE ENGRAVED IN ITS SKULL WAS SUBMERGED BY THE SIMPLE DESIRE TO HAVE POLO'S LIFE.



KILL JACK POLO!



SOMEWHERE IN HELL, THE POWERS FELT THE SIN, AND KNEW THE WAR FOR JACK POLO'S SOUL WAS LOST.

JACK FELT IT TOO.



IT WAS COMING AFTER HIM!
THE THING HAD BROKEN
THE FIRST RULE OF ITS
EXISTENCE. IT WAS FORFEIT.

QUE.
SERA
SERA.

THE YATTERING
COULD BEAR IT
NO LONGER.



THE TOUCH WAS THE SECOND SIN; AND IT AGONIZED THE VATTERING BEYOND ENDURANCE. IT BAYED LIKE A BANSHEE AND REELED AWAY FROM THE CONTACT.

IT KNEW ITS MISTAKE, THE LESSONS IT HAD LEARNED WERE HURLING BACK. IT KNEW THE PUNISHMENT TOO, FOR LEAVING THE HOUSE, FOR TOUCHING THE MAN.

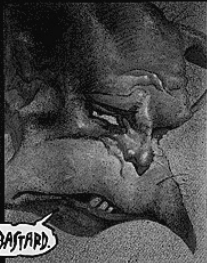
IT WAS BOUND TO A NEW LORD, ENSLAVED TO THIS IDIOT-CREATURE STANDING OVER IT.

POLO HAD WON.

LIKE A PHOTOGRAPH DEVELOPING
ON A SHEET OF PAPER, THE
IMAGE OF THE FURY CAME
CLEAR TO POLO'S EYES. THE
LAW HAD TAKEN ITS TOLL.



THE YATTERING COULD NEVER
HIDE FROM ITS MASTER AGAIN.
THERE IT WAS, PLAIN TO
POLO'S EYES IN ALL ITS
CHARMLESS GLORY.



YOU BASTARD.



ITS ACCENT HAD AN AUSTRALIAN LILT.

YOU WILL
NOT SPEAK
UNLESS
SPOKEN TO.

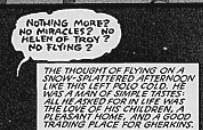
UNDERSTOOD?

YES.

YES,
MISTER
POLO.

YES,
MISTER
POLO.

YOU
MAY
STAND.



THE YATTERING FUMBLER FOR THE SPECIAL WORD IT HAD HEARD REELZEBUB USE.

HEAVEN.

THIS WAS THE CLEVEREST MANUEVER IT HAD ATTEMPTED: IT WAS JUSSING THEOLOGY HERE.

THE CREATURE WAS PROBABLY TELLING THE TRUTH: ASSOCIATION WITH IT OR ITS LIKE WOULD NOT BE LOOKED UPON BENIGNLY BY THE HOST OF SAINTS AND ANGELS.

HE PROBABLY WAS FORBIDDEN ACCESS TO THE PLAINS OF PARADISE.

WELL, YOU KNOW WHAT I HAVE TO SAY ABOUT THAT, DON'T YOU?

NO, IT DIDN'T KNOW. THEN IT SAW WHAT POLO WAS DRIVING AT.

WHAT DO I SAY?

QUE SERÁ SERÁ.

KLIK



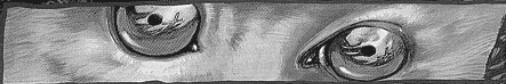
Merry Christmas



HOW SPIDERS BLEED



LOCKE RAISED HIS EYES TO THE TREES. THE WIND WAS MOVING IN THEM, AND THE COMMOTION OF THEIR LADEN BRANCHES SOUNDED LIKE THE RIVER IN FULL SPATE. ONE IMPERSONATION OF MANY. WHEN HE HAD FIRST COME TO THE JUNGLE, HE HAD BEEN AWED BY THE SHEER MULTIPLICITY OF BEAST AND BLOSSOM, THE RESTLESS PARADE OF LIFE, BUT HE HAD LEARNED BETTER. THIS BURGEONING DIVERSITY WAS A SHAM: THE JUNGLE PRETENDED ITSELF AN ARTLESS GARDEN. IT WAS NOT.



WHERE THE UNTUTORED TRAVELLER SAW ONLY A BRILLIANT SHOW OF NATURAL SPLENDOURS, LOCKE NOW RECOGNISED A SUBTLE CONSPIRACY AT WORK, IN WHICH EACH THING MIMICKED SOME OTHER THING.



ROUND AND ROUND IN A DIZZING CIRCLE OF IMPERSONATIONS, A WALL OF MIRRORS WHICH CONFOUNDED THE SENSES AND WOULD, GIVEN TIME, ROT REASON ALTOGETHER.



LOCKE?

LOCKE,
ARE YOU
AWAKE?

WHAT
DO YOU
WANT?

I CAN'T
SLEEP. I'VE BEEN
THINKING THE SUPPLY
PLANE COMES IN FROM
SANTAREM THE DAY AFTER
TOMORROW. WE COULD
BE BACK THERE IN A
FEW HOURS, OUT OF
ALL THIS.

I MEAN
PERMANENTLY...
ANAH.

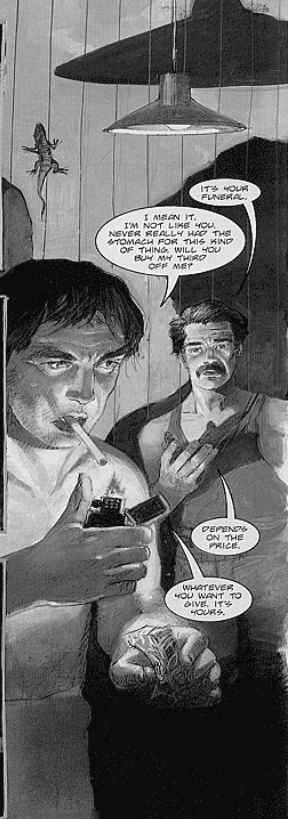
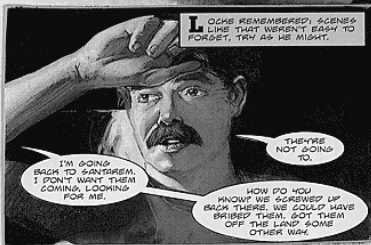
PERMANENTLY?

I DON'T
BELIEVE IN CURSES.
DON'T THINK I DO.
BUT YOU SAW CHERICK'S
BODY...WHAT HAPPENED
TO HIM.

THERE'S A
DISEASE--WHAT'S IT
CALLED? WHEN THE
BLOOD DOESN'T SET
PROPERLY?

HEMOPHILIA. HE
DIDN'T HAVE HEMOPHILIA
AND WE BOTH KNOW IT. I'VE
SEEN HIM CUT A MILLION
TIMES. HE MENDED LIKE
YOU OR I DO.

ALL
RIGHT. THEN
WHAT KILLED
HIM?



CONFESSIONAL
OVER, STUMPF
RETURNED TO
HIS BED.

IT WOULD SOON
BE LIGHT
ANOTHER JUNGLE
DRAIN.



HOW HE HATED
THE PLACE. AT
LEAST HE WOULDN'T
TOUCHED ANY OF
THE INDIANS.
WOULDN'T EVEN BEEN
WITHIN BREATHING
DISTANCE OF
THEM.



WHATEVER
INFECTION
THEY'D PASSED
ON TO CHERRICK,
HE COULD
SURELY NOT BE
TAINED. IN
LESS THAN
FORTY-EIGHT
HOURS HE WOULD
BE AWAY TO
SANTAREM, AND
THEN ON TO SOME
CITY, ANY CITY,
WHERE THE TRIBE
COULD NEVER
FOLLOW.



HED ALREADY
DONE HIS
PENANCE.
HADN'T HE?



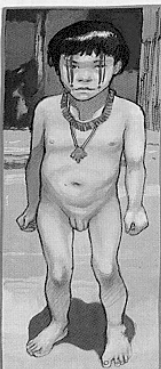
STUMPF PRANED,
AND SLIPPED,
BEFORE THE
MOMENTS BEGAN
TO CALL UP THE
DRY, INTO A
SPOILER'S SLEEP.



THEY HAD COME INTO THE INDIAN HAMLET AT NOON: THE SUN A BASHFUL EYE.



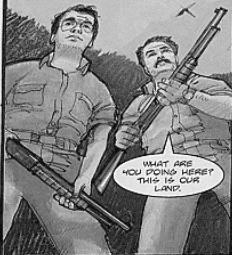
IT WAS CHERRICK WHO FIRST SPOTTED THE CHILD.



AT FIRST THEY THOUGHT THE PLACE DESERTED. LOOKS AND CHERRICK HAD ADVANCED INTO THE COMPOUND, LEAVING THE DYSENTERY-RIDDEN STUMPF IN THE JEEP.



IF THERE WAS A FLICKER OF FEELING ON THEIR FACES, LOCKE COULD NOT READ IT. THESE PEOPLE WERE IMPOSSIBLE TO DECIPHER: DECEIT WAS THEIR ONLY SKILL.



WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE? THIS IS OUR LAND.

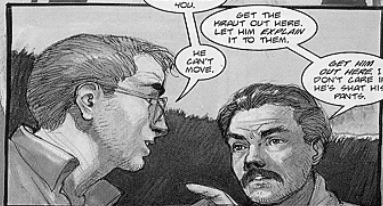


THEY DON'T UNDERSTAND YOU.

GET THE MRAUT OUT HERE. LET HIM EXPLAIN IT TO THEM.

WE CAN'T MOVE.

GET HIM OUT HERE. I DON'T CARE IF HE'S SHAT HIS PANTS.



CHERRICK EASED AWAY, LEAVING LOCKE STANDING IN THE RING OF HUTS.



THERE WERE AT MOST TWO DOZEN INDIANS, DESCENDANTS OF THE GREAT PEOPLE THAT HAD ONCE ROAMED THE AMAZON BASIN IN THEIR TENS OF THOUSANDS.

NOW THOSE TRIBES WERE ALL BUT DECIMATED. THE FOREST IN WHICH THEY HAD PROSPERED FOR GENERATIONS WAS BEING LEVELLED AND BURNED; EIGHT-LANE HIGHWAYS WERE SPEEDING THROUGH THEIR HUNTING GROUNDS. ALL THEY HELD SACRED WAS BEING TRAMPLED AND TRESPASSED.

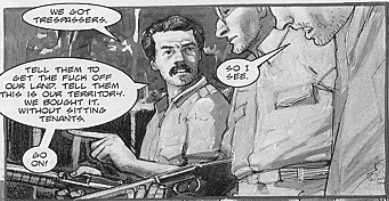
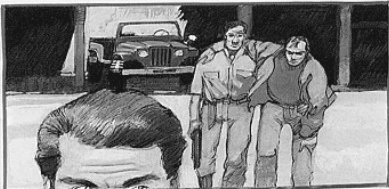


THEY WERE EXILES IN THEIR OWN LAND.

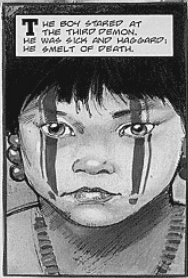
BUT STILL THEY DECLINED TO PAY HOMAGE TO THEIR NEW MASTERS, DESPITE THE RIFLES THEY BROUGHT.

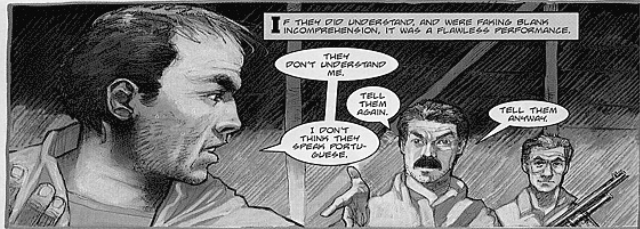
ONLY DEATH WOULD CONVINCE THEM OF DEFEAT, LOCKE MUSED.





S TUMPF TOOK SEVERAL SECONDS TO WORK OUT HIS PATTERN, THEN SPOKE A FEW WILTING WORDS IN BAD PORTUGUESE.





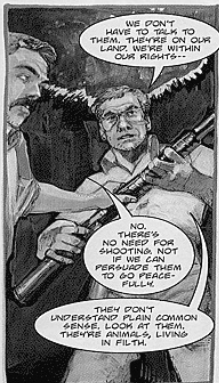
IF THEY DID UNDERSTAND, AND WERE FAKING BLANK INCOMPREHENSION, IT WAS A FLAWLESS PERFORMANCE.

THEY
DON'T UNDERSTAND
ME.

TELL
THEM
AGAIN.

I DON'T
THINK THEY
SPEAK PORTU-
GUESE.

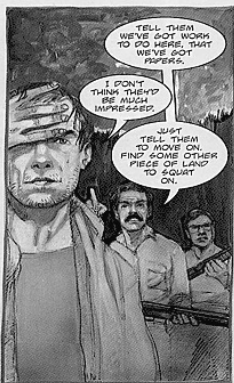
TELL THEM
ANYWAY.



WE DON'T
HAVE TO TALK
TO THEM. THEY'RE ON OUR
LAND. WE'RE WITHIN
OUR RIGHTS--

NO.
THERE'S
NO NEED FOR
SHOOTING. NOT
IF WE CAN
PERSUADE THEM
TO GO PEACE-
FULLY.

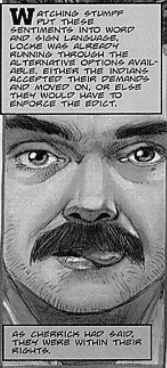
THEY DON'T
UNDERSTAND PLAIN COMMON
SENSE. LOOK AT THEM.
THEY'RE ANIMALS. LIVING
IN FILTH.



TELL THEM
WE'VE GOT WORK
TO DO HERE. THAT
WE'VE GOT
PAPERS.

I DON'T
THINK THEY'D
BE MUCH
IMPRESSED.

JUST
TELL THEM
TO MOVE ON.
FIND SOME OTHER
PIECE OF LAND
TO SQUAT
ON.



WATCHING STUMPF
PUT THESE
SENTIMENTS INTO WORD
AND SIGN LANGUAGE.
LOCKE WAS ALREADY
RUNNING THROUGH THE
ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS AVAIL-
ABLE. EITHER THE INDIANS
ACCEPTED THEIR DEMANDS
AND MOVED ON, OR ELSE
THEY WOULD HAVE TO
ENFORCE THE EDICT.

AS CHERRICK HAD SAID,
THEY WERE WITHIN THEIR
RIGHTS.



LOCKE HAD NO
ACTIVE DESIRES
TO SHED BLOOD.
THE WORLD WAS TOO
FULL OF BLEEDING
HEART LIBERALS
AND DOE-EYED
SENTIMENTALISTS
TO MAKE GENOCIDE
THE MOST CONVE-
NIENT SOLUTION.



BUT THE GUN
HAD BEEN USED
BEFORE, AND
WOULD BE USED
AGAIN, UNTIL
EVERY UNWASHED
INDIAN HAD
PUT ON A PAIR OF
TROUSERS AND
GIVEN UP EATING
MONKEYS.

INDEED, THE PIN OF LIBERALS NOTWITHSTANDING, THE
GUN HAD ITS APPEAL. IT WAS SWIFT AND ABSOLUTE.

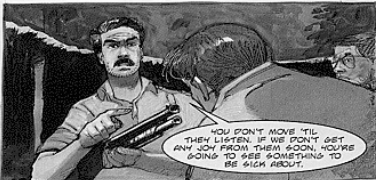
AT THE THOUGHT OF THESE
SCARLET-FACED SAVAGES LAID
LOW, LOCKE FELT HIS TRIGGER
FINGER ITCH, PHYSICALLY ITCH.

STUMPF HAD FINISHED HIS ENCORE;
IT HAD MET WITH NO RESPONSE.

BE MY
GUEST.

I'M
GOING TO
BE SICK.

PLEASE
I HAVE TO
LIE DOWN, I DON'T
WANT THEM
WATCHING ME.



YOU DON'T MOVE 'TIL
THEY LISTEN. IF WE DON'T GET
ANY JOY FROM THEM SOON, YOU'RE
GOING TO SEE SOMETHING TO
BE SICK ABOUT.

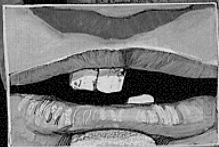
LOCKE TOYED WITH THE STOCK OF
HIS RIFLE AS HE SPOKE, RUNNING
A BROKEN THUMB-NAIL ALONG THE
NICKS IN IT. THERE WERE PERHAPS A
DOZEN, EACH ONE A HUMAN GRAVE.

THE JUNGLE CONCEALED MURDER SO
EASILY, IT ALMOST SEEMED, IN ITS
CRYPTIC FASHION, TO CONDONE THE CRIME.

FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE THEIR APPEARANCE,
ONE OF THE ASSEMBLY MOVED.

HE WAS AN ANCIENT, FULLY THIRTY YEARS
OLDER THAN MOST OF THE TRIBE.

AND HE SPOKE...



WHAT EMERGED FROM HIS SCRAGGY THROAT WAS NOT A LANGUAGE MADE OF WORDS, BUT ONLY OF SOUND: A POTPOURRI OF JUNGLE NOISES. THERE WAS NO DISCERNIBLE PATTERN TO THE OUTPOURING; IT WAS SIMPLY A DISPLAY--AWESOME IN ITS WAY--OF IMPERSONATIONS.

THE MAN COULD MURMUR LIKE A JAGUAR, SCREECH LIKE A PARROT. HE COULD FIND IN HIS THROAT THE SLASH OF RAIN ON ORCHIDS, THE HOWL OF MONKEYS.

THE SOUNDS MADE STUMPF'S GORGE RISE.

THE JUNGLE HAD DISEASED HIM, DEHYDRATED HIM AND LEFT HIM WRUNG OUT. NOW THIS RHEUMY-EYED STICK-MAN WAS VOMITING THE WHOLE OTTICUS PLACE UP AT HIM.

WHAT'S HE SAYING?

WHAT DOES IT SOUND LIKE? IT'S ALL NOISES.

THE FUCKER'S CURSING US!

THE OLD MAN'S SONG-SPEECH LOWERED IN PITCH. HE WAS SINGING TWILIGHT, THAT BRIEF AMBIGUITY BETWEEN THE FIERCE DAY AND THE SUFFOCATING NIGHT.

WHAT ARE YOU SAYING? TALK SENSE!

BUT THE NIGHT-NOISES ONLY WHISPERED ON, AN UNBROKEN STREAM.

THIS IS OUR VILLAGE.



OUR VILLAGE. OUR LAND.

YOU SPEAK ENGLISH.

SOME.

WHY DIDN'T YOU ANSWER ME EARLIER?



NOT MY PLACE TO SPEAK. HE IS THE ELDER.

THE CHIEF YOU MEANT?

THE CHIEF IS DEAD. ALL HIS FAMILY IS DEAD. THIS IS THE WISEST OF US...

THEN YOU TELL HIM...

NO NEED TO TELL. HE UNDERSTANDS YOU.

HE SPEAKS ENGLISH TOO!



NO. YOU ARE... TRANSPARENT.



TELL HIM ANYWAY. TELL THEM ALL. THIS IS OUR LAND. WE BOUGHT IT.

THE TRIBE HAS ALWAYS LIVED HERE.

NOT ANY LONGER.

WE'VE GOT PAPERS... FROM THE GOVERNMENT.

WE WERE HERE BEFORE THE GOVERNMENT.

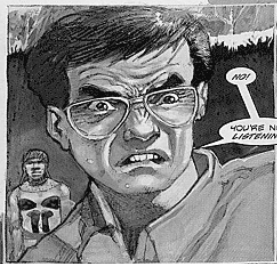


THEN, LIKE THE CLOSING OF A DEPARTING DREAM, THE OLD MAN STOPPED TALKING THE FOREST.

CALL HIM BACK! MAKE HIM TELL THE REST THEY'VE GOT TO GO.

HEY!

AROUND THE COMPOUND, OTHERS WERE ALSO TURNING AWAY. THE OLD MAN'S WITHDRAWAL APPARENTLY SIGNALLING THAT THE SHOW WAS OVER.



NO!

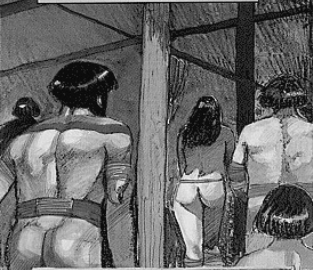
YOU'RE NOT LISTENING!



DESPITE HIS HYSTERIA, HE WAS RAPIDLY LOSING HIS AUDIENCE.

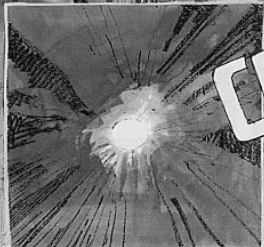
YOU FUCKING SCUM!

IT ONLY ENRAGED CHERRICK FURTHER.



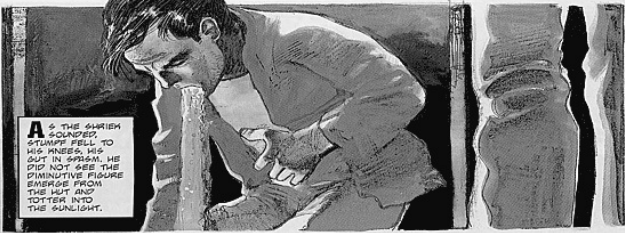
LISTEN TO ME! LISTEN YOU BASTARD!

ESH...



CRASH

FROM WITHIN THE HUT CAME A TINY SHRIEK, NOT LIKE THE OLD MAN'S VOICE AT ALL.



AS THE SHRIEK SOUNDED, STUMPF FELL TO HIS KNEES, HIS OUT IN SPASM. HE DID NOT SEE THE DIMINUTIVE FIGURE EMERGE FROM THE HUT AND TOTTER INTO THE SUNLIGHT.



WHEN HE DID LOOK UP, AND SAW HOW THE CHILD WITH THE SCARLET FACE CLUTCHED HIS BELLY, STUMPF HOPED HIS EYES LIED.

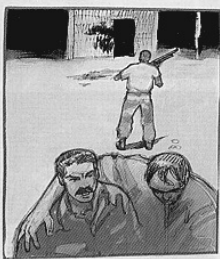


BUT THEY DID NOT LIE.



SOMEWHERE AMONGST THE HUTS A WOMAN BEGAN TO SOB QUIETLY. FOR A MOMENT THE WORLD SPUN ON A PIN-HEAD, BALANCED EXQUISITELY BETWEEN SILENCE AND THE CRY THAT MUST BREAK IT, BETWEEN A TRUCE HELD AND THE COMING ATROCITY.

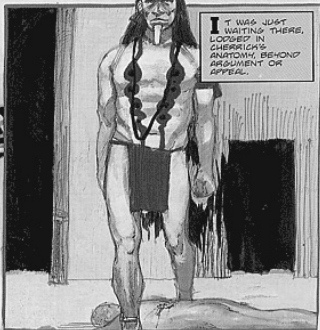


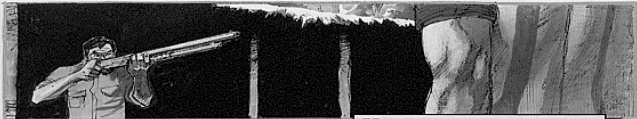


THEN, AS HE LOOKED BACK TOWARD THE COMPOUND, IT SEEMED AS THOUGH THE TRIBE BREATHED TOGETHER ONE SOLID BREATH...



...AND HEARING THAT SOUND, CHERRICK FELT DEATH WEDGE ITSELF LIKE A FISH-BONE IN HIS THROAT, TOO DEEP TO BE PLUCKED OUT BY HIS FINGERS, TOO BIG TO BE SHAT.





HAD HE TOUCHED THE BOY IF SO, IT HAD BEEN AN ASTONISHING SLEIGHT-OF-HAND, FOR CHERRICK HAD SEEN NOTHING.



TRICK OR NO TRICK, THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DISPLAY WAS PERFECTLY APPARENT: HE WAS BEING ACCUSED OF MURDER.



AS HE SPOKE HE SEEMED TO SEE A SHIFTING IN THE OLD MAN'S FEATURES.



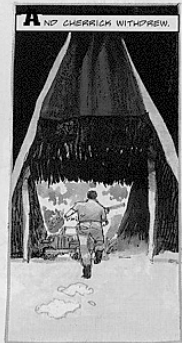
YOU DON'T FRIGHTEN ME, YOU UNDERSTAND? I'M NOT A FOOL.



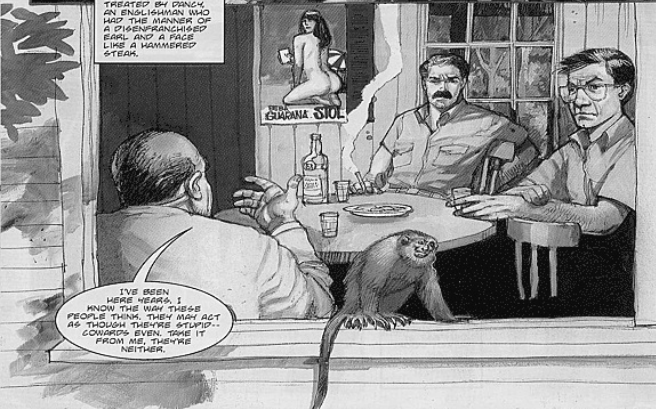
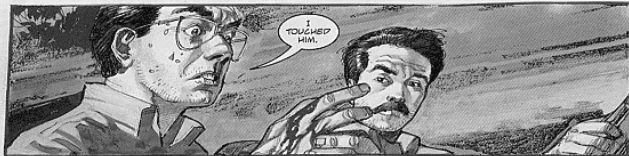
BENEATH THE CORRUPTION OF AGE, A HINT OF THE CHILD NOW DEAD AT THE HUT DOOR! THE TINY MOUTH EVEN SEEMED TO SMILE.



THEN, AS SUBTLY AS IT APPEARED, THE ILLUSION FADED.



AND CHERRICK WITHDREW.



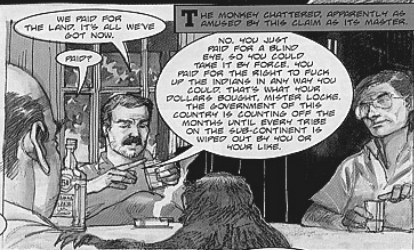


THEY DIDN'T MOVE ON US EVEN THOUGH THEY OUTNUMBERED US TEN TO ONE. IF THAT ISN'T CONARDICE, WHAT IS IT?



THIRTY YEARS AGO THIS WHOLE TERRITORY WAS THEIR HOMELAND. NOBODY WANTED IT. THEY WENT WHERE THEY LIKED, DID WHAT THEY LIKED, AS FAR AS THE WHITES WERE CONCERNED. THE JUNGLE WAS FILTHY AND DISEASE-INFECTED. WE WANTED NO PART OF IT.

AND, OF COURSE, IN SOME WAYS WE WERE RIGHT. IT IS FILTHY AND DISEASE-INFECTED, BUT IT'S ALSO GOT RESERVES WE NOW WANT BADLY. MINERALS, OIL. MAYBE...POWER.



WE PAID FOR THE LAND. IT'S ALL WE'VE GOT NOW.

PAID?

THE MONKEY CHATTERED, APPARENTLY AS AMUSED BY THIS CLAIM AS ITS MASTER.

NO, YOU JUST PAID FOR A BLIND EYE, SO YOU COULD TAKE IT BY FORCE. YOU PAID FOR THE RIGHT TO FUCK UP THE INDIANS IN ANY WAY YOU COULD. THAT'S WHAT YOUR DOLLARS BOUGHT, MISTER LOCKE. THE GOVERNMENT OF THIS COUNTRY IS COUNTING OFF THE MONTHS UNTIL EVERY TRIBE ON THE SUB-CONTINENT IS WIPE OUT BY YOU OR YOUR LINE.



SO WHY'D YOU COME HERE, IF YOU'RE SO FUCKING CLEVERT

SAME REASON AS YOU.

WHAT REASON IS THAT?

GREED.



I THOUGHT I COULD MAKE MY FORTUNE OUT HERE. THE SAME WAY YOU DO...I GAVE MYSELF TWO YEARS. THREE AT THE MOST. THAT WAS THE BEST PART OF TWO DECADES AGO.

THE JUNGLE EATS YOU UP AND SPITS YOU OUT, SOONER OR LATER.

NOT ME.



EXTINCTION'S IN THE AIR, MISTER LOCKE. I CAN SMELL IT.

THEY WON'T COME HERE, WILL THEY? THEY WON'T FOLLOW US?

THE QUESTION, SPOKEN IN ONLY A WHISPER, BEGGED FOR A REPLY IN THE NEGATIVE.

TRY AS HE MIGHT, CHERRICK COULD NOT DISCLOSE THE SIGHTS OF THE PREVIOUS DAY.



NEXT DOOR STUMPF HAD BEGUN TO HOWL. DANCY'S CONSOLING VOICE COULD BE HEARD, ATTEMPTING TO TALK DOWN THE PANIC. HE WAS FAINTLY FAILING.

STUMPF'S CRIES GAVE FORCE TO THE OBSERVATION. IT WAS NOT THE VOICE OF A WHOLE-SOME CREATURE. THERE WAS PUTRESCENCE IN IT.



ON THE FOURTH DAY OF THEIR ARRIVAL AT THE POST, STUMPF'S FEVER ABATED, MUCH TO DANCY'S DISAPPOINTMENT.

THE WORST OF IT'S OVER, GIVE HIM TWO MORE DAYS REST AND YOU CAN HEAD BACK TO YOUR LABORS.

TIME TO GET OURSELVES SOME HELP AND GO BACK IN THERE.

BUT NO MORE GUNS.

CHERRICK HADN'T TOUCHED HIS RIFLE SINCE THEY'D ARRIVED AT THE POST. IN FACT, HE KEPT FROM CONTACT WITH ANYTHING BUT A BOTTLE AND HIS BED.

HIS SKIN SEEMED TO CRAWL AND CREEP PERPETUALLY.

NO NEED FOR GUNS.

IF YOU MEAN WAITING FOR THEM TO DIE OUT NATURALLY, I'M NOT THAT PATIENT.

NO, WE CAN BE SWIFTER THAN THAT.

HOW?

THEY'RE MY LIVELIHOOD, OR PART OF IT. YOU'RE ASKING ME TO HELP YOU MAKE MYSELF BANKRUPT.

WHAT'S IT WORTH? YOUR WISDOM?

A CUT OF WHATEVER YOU FIND ON YOUR LAND.

ALL RIGHT, TETELMAN, TALK.

THEY NEED MEDICINE BECAUSE THEY'RE SO SUSCEPTIBLE TO OUR DISEASES. A DECENT PLAGUE CAN WIPE THEM OUT PRACTICALLY OVERNIGHT.

ONE FELL SWOOP, THEY'VE GOT PRACTICALLY NO DEFENCES AGAINST CERTAIN BACTERIA. NEVER HAD TO BUILD UP ANY RESISTANCE. THE CLAP. SMALLPOX. EVEN MEASLES.

HOW?

I ASKED HOW?

BLANKETS.

DEAD MEN'S BLANKETS.

A LITTLE BEFORE DAWN OF THE NIGHT OF STUMPF'S RECOVERY, CHERICK WOKE SUDDENLY, STARTLED FROM HIS REST BY BAD DREAMS.

IT WAS THE WORDS HE DREAMT. WORDS COMING FROM THE OLD MAN'S TOOTHLESS MOUTH WHICH BROUGHT ON THE COLD SWEATS THAT ENGAGED HIS BODY.

AND SUDDENLY THE BLOODY HANDS WERE THERE, SUSPENDED IN THE PITCH.

THERE WAS NO FACE, NO SKIN, NO TRIBE, JUST THE HANDS.

BUT HE KNEW BETTER.

AND NOW, THE VOICE, HERE WERE THE WORDS HE HAD DREAMT SPOKEN. HE LAY LIKE A NEW-BORN, LISTENING TO ITS PARENTS TALK BUT UNABLE TO MAKE ANY SIGNIFICANCE OF THEIR EXCHANGES.

WHAT WERE THE WORDS? HE COULDN'T RECALL THEM NOW.

HE WAS IGNORANT, WASN'T HE? HE TASTED THE SOURNESS OF HIS STUPIDITY FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE CHILDHOOD.

HE STRUGGLED, WISHING HE COULD STOP THE VOICE AND ASK FOR EXPLANATION.

BUT IT WAS ALREADY FADING.

THE VOICE MADE HIM FEARFUL OF AMBIGUITIES HE HAD RIDDEN ROUGHSHOD OVER, OF WHISPERS HIS SHOUTING LIFE HAD RENDERED INAPABLE.

HE FUMBLER FOR COMPREHENSION, AND WAS NOT ENTIRELY FRUSTRATED. THE MAN WAS SPEAKING OF THE WORLD, AND OF EXILE FROM THE WORLD, OF BEING BROKEN ALWAYS BY WHAT ONE SEEKS TO POSSESS.

D... DREAMING.

HANDS AND VOICE HAD GONE, AND WITH THEM ALL BUT AN IRRITATING MURMUR OF WHAT HE HAD ALMOST UNDERSTOOD.



HIS BACK AND BUTTOCKS, AND THE UNDER-SIDE OF HIS THIGHS, FELT SORE.

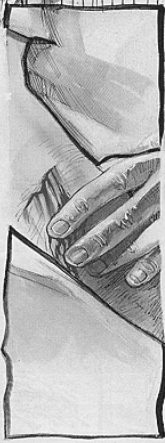
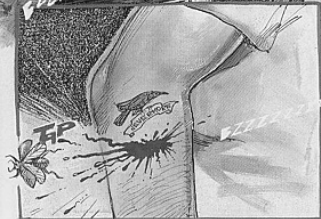
THERE WAS AGAIN THE ITCH OF TENDERNESS IN HIS SKIN THAT HE'D SUFFERED SINCE COMING TO THE POST. HE WANTED TO BE AWAY FROM THIS PLACE, AND BADLY.

THERE WAS A CUT IN THE CUSHION OF HIS THUMB, WHERE THE MOSQUITO NET HAD NICKED HIS FLESH.

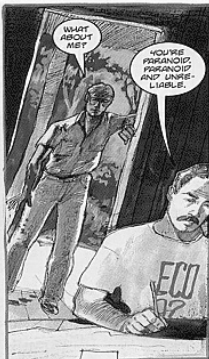
THE CLOTHES HE PUT ON WERE A SCOURGE TO HIS BACK. HE SEEMED TO FEEL EVERY THREAD CHAFING HIS NERVE ENDINGS.

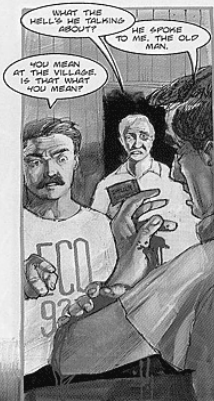


HE FELT STRANGE. THERE WAS SOMETHING ABOUT THIS DAWNING DRY WHICH MADE HIM PROFOUNDLY UNBASY. HE KNEW THE DANGERS OF COURTING UNFOUNDED FEARS, AND HE TRIED TO FORBID THEM, BUT THEY WERE INCONTESTABLE.



IT WASN'T THE BLOOD OF THE INSECT, BUT HIS OWN.





WHAT THE HELL'S HE TALKING ABOUT?

HE SPOKE TO ME, THE OLD MAN.

YOU MEAN AT THE VILLAGE. IS THAT WHAT YOU MEANT?



HE WANTS US OUT. EXILES. LIKE THEM. LIKE THEM!

I BELIEVE YOU. JUST SLOW DOWN. WE CAN SORT IT OUT.

NO. IT'S PUSHING US OUT. EVERYTHING WE TOUCH. EVERYTHING WE TOUCH...

WHAT'S HAPPENING TO ME?

LET ME HELP.

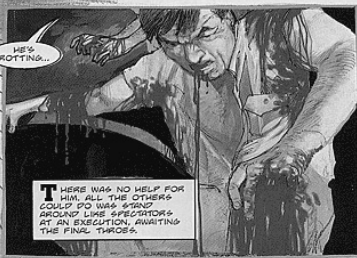


NO DON'T TOUCH ME!

IT'S ALL RIGHT.

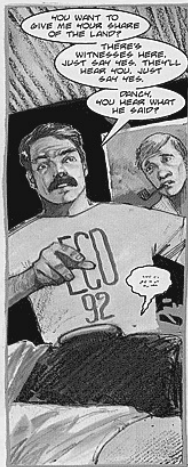


IT WASN'T. DANCY FELT THE FLESH SLIP AWAY FROM THE BONE. THE SENSATION BEATED EVEN HIS TASTE FOR AGONY.



HE'S ROTTING...

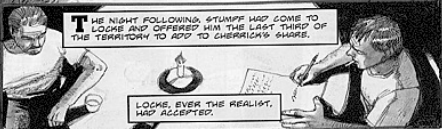
THERE WAS NO HELP FOR HIM. ALL THE OTHERS COULD DO WAS STAND AROUND LIKE SPECTATORS AT AN EXECUTION, AWAITING THE FINAL THROES.



THEY HAD BURIED HIM TOWARDS EVENING. THE CORPSE HAD BEGUN TO PUTREFY BY THE TIME IT WAS SEWN UP IN CANVAS FOR THE BURIAL.



THE NIGHT FOLLOWING, STUMPF HAD COME TO LOCKE AND OFFERED HIM THE LAST THIRD OF THE TERRITORY TO ADD TO CHERAK'S SHARE.



LOCKE, EVER THE REALIST, HAD ACCEPTED.

THE EVENING OF THE NEXT DAY, AS STUMPF HAD HOPED, THE SUPPLY PLANE CAME IN.



LOCKE ELECTED TO FLY BACK TO SANTAREM TO BUY UP FRESH SUPPLIES AND, IF POSSIBLE, HIRE A RELIABLE DRIVER AND GUNMAN.

AT SANTAREM, THEY PARTED WITH A SINGLE HANDSHAKE WHICH LEFT EVERY NERVE IN STUMPF'S HAND SCOURGED...



...AN OPEN CUT IN THE TENDER FLESH BETWEEN HIS INDEX FINGER AND THUMB.

SANTAREM WASN'T RID. LOCKE MUSED, AS HE MADE HIS WAY DOWN TO A BAR AT THE SOUTH END OF TOWN, IN SEARCH OF THE KIND OF LOCAL ENTERTAINMENT OF WHICH HE NEVER TIRED.

THE WOMEN OF SANTAREM WERE AS UNPREDICTABLE AS THE BEER, BUT LOCKE HAD NO EYE FOR BEAUTY IN THE OPPOSITE SEX; HIS PLEASURE WAS IN SEEING JUST WHAT A WOMAN WOULD DO FOR A FEW SHABBY DOLLAR BILLS.



HE HAD FINALLY FOUND ONE WHO--ONCE DRUNKENNESS HAD PERSUADED HER TO ABANDON WHAT LITTLE HOPE OF DIGNITY SHE HAD--WAS WILLING TO ACCED TO A PARTICULAR PECCADILLO...



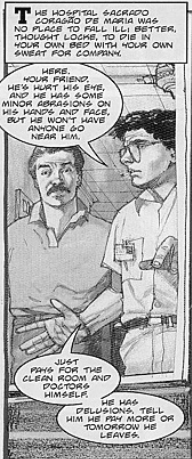
FUCK.

\$1.
FOOK.
FOOK.



WHO IS IT?

MENAGEME.
BENNING LOCKE.
URGENTE.
URGENTE.



IT HAPPENED TO GERRICK, AND NOW IT'S HAPPENING TO ME. NONE OF US'LL ESCAPE, NOT UNLESS WE MAKE AMENDS.

LOOK, YOU'VE GOT TO VACATE THE ROOM. I'VE BEEN TOLD YOU'VE GOT TO GET OUT BY MORNING.

NO, I CAN'T LEAVE, I CAN'T LEAVE.

THE DUST, THE DUST IN THE AIR, IT'LL CUT ME UP. I GOT A SPECK IN MY EYE--JUST A SPECK--AND THE NEXT THING MY EYE'S BLEEDING AS THOUGH IT'LL NEVER STOP. I CAN'T HARDLY LIE DOWN. THE SHEETS' LIKE A BED OF NAILS. YOU'VE GOT TO HELP ME.

HOW?

PAY THEM FOR THE ROOM. PAY THEM SO I CAN STAY 'TIL YOU GET A SPECIALIST FROM SAO LUIS. THEN GO BACK TO THE VILLAGE, LOCKE. GO BACK AND TELL THEM. I DON'T WANT THE LAND. TELL THEM I DON'T OWN IT ANY LONGER.

HE'S HERE.

MY GOD.

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

I'LL GO BACK, BUT IN MY OWN GOOD TIME.

TELL THEM TO LET ME GO, PLEASE.

THERE'S NOTHING THERE.

SEE?

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING AT? YOU HAVEN'T GOT GERRICK'S DISEASE. YOU CAN'T HAVE. YOU DIDN'T TOUCH THEM. WE ASKED. DAMN YOU, GERRICK TOUCHED THEM-- WE DIDN'T.

WE WERE WRONG.

THIS ISN'T SOMETHING YOU CAN BEAT INTO SUBMISSION, LOCKE. IT'S OUT OF OUR HANDS.

SEE?

STUMPF'S SUDDEN, FATALISTIC CALM FRIGHTENED LOCKE.

THE ROOM WAS LOCKED. THE KEY WAS ON THE INSIDE, WHERE STUMPF HAD PAID FOR IT TO BE.

KEEP OUT. KEEP AWAY FROM ME.



SOMEWHERE NEARBY A WOMAN BEGAN TO YELL. NO MATTER: LOCKE WOULD HAVE HIS HANDS ON THE GERMAN BEFORE HELP COULD COME...



...AND THEN, BY CHRIST, HE'D WIFE EVERY LAST VESTIGE OF A SMILE FROM THE BOYARD'S LIPS.

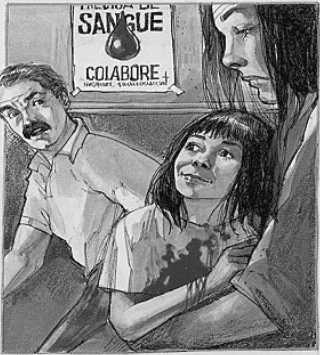
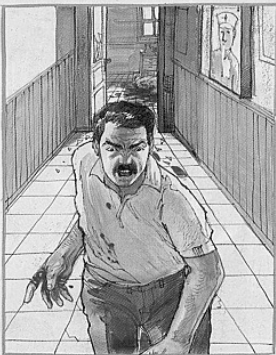
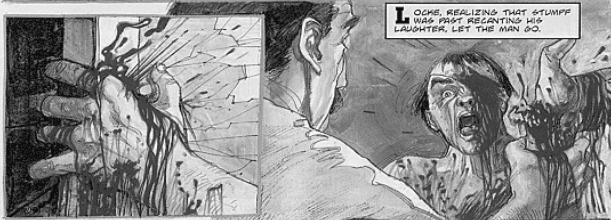
IN THE ANTISEPTIC COCOON OF HIS ROOM, STUMPF FELT THE FIRST BLAST OF UNCLEAN AIR FROM THE OUTSIDE WORLD. IT WAS NO MORE THEN A LIGHT BREEZE THAT INVADIED HIS MAKE-SHIFT SANCTUARY, BUT IT BORE UPON ITS BACK THE DEBRIS OF THE WORLD.

SOOT AND SEEDS, FLAMES OF SKIN ITCHED OFF A THOUSAND SCALPS, FLUFF AND SAND AND TWIST OF HAIR, THE BRIGHT DUST FROM A MOTH'S WING.



NOTES SO SMALL THE HUMAN EYE ONLY GLIMPSED THEM IN A SHAFT OF WHITE SUNLIGHT, EACH A TINY, WHIRLING SPECK QUITE HARMLESS TO MOST LIVING ORGANISMS.

BUT THIS CLOUD WAS LETHAL TO STUMPF. IN SECONDS HIS BODY BECAME A FIELD OF TINY, SEEPING WOUNDS.



THERE WAS NOBODY LOCKE KNEW AT TETELMAN'S STORE. THE WIRE HANDS WERE DRUNK, THEIR MASTERS HAVING GONE OFF INTO THE JUNGLE THE PREVIOUS DAY.



AFTER ALL, IT HADN'T BEEN HE WHO FIRED THE KILLING SHOT. HE HAD NOT WARNED THE PEOPLE IN ANY WAY.



IF THEY SHOULD REQUIRE SOME PENANCE OF HIM, HE WAS NOT ABOVE ACCEDING TO THEIR DEMANDS. HE HAD SEEN SO MUCH SUFFERING OF LATE. HE WANTED TO BE CLEANSED OF IT.

LOCKE PERSUADED THE MOST SOBER OF THE MEN TO ACCOMPANY HIM BACK TO THE VILLAGE AS TRANSLATOR.



HE HAD NO REAL IDEA OF HOW HE WOULD MAKE HIS PEACE WITH THE TRIBE. HE WAS ONLY CERTAIN THAT HE HAD TO ARGUE HIS INNOCENCE.

ANYTHING THEY ASKED, WITHIN REASON, HE WOULD COMPLY WITH. ANYTHING TO AVOID DYING LIKE THE OTHERS, HE'D EVEN GIVE BACK THE LAND.

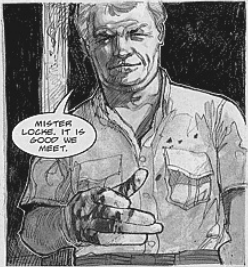


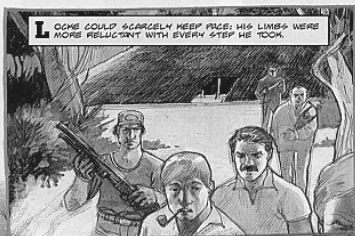
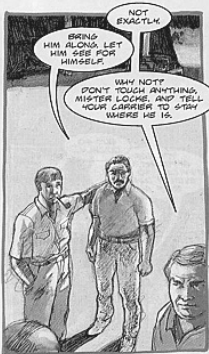
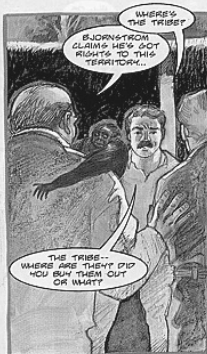
MY GOD, WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?

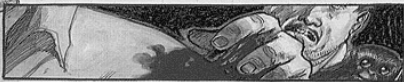
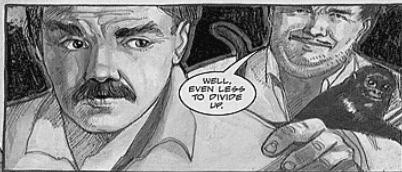
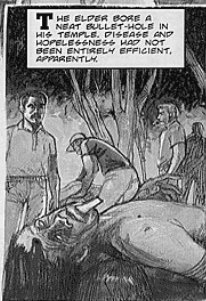
I MIGHT ASK YOU THE SAME QUESTION.

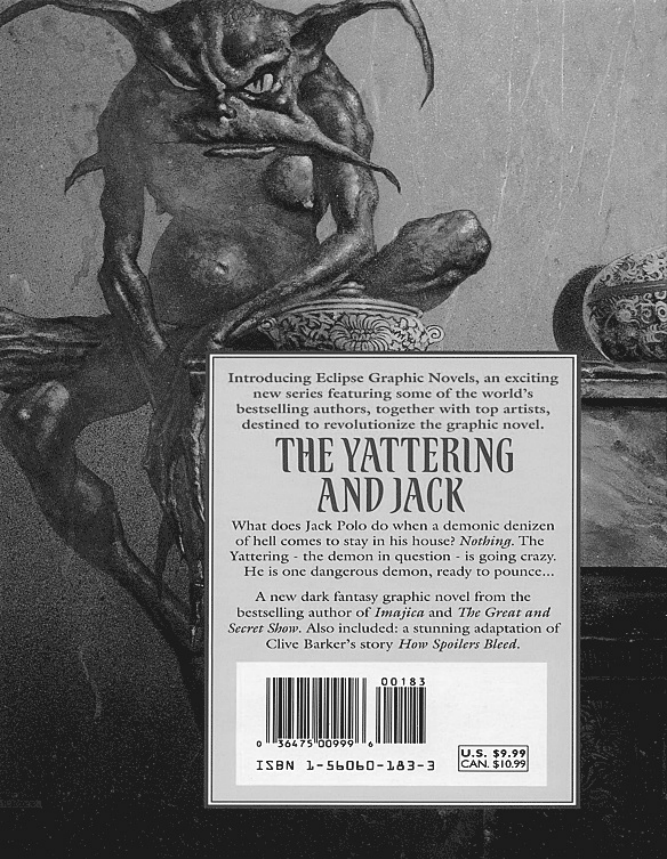


MISTER LOCKE, IT IS GOOD WE MEET.









Introducing Eclipse Graphic Novels, an exciting new series featuring some of the world's bestselling authors, together with top artists, destined to revolutionize the graphic novel.

THE YATTERING AND JACK

What does Jack Polo do when a demonic denizen of hell comes to stay in his house? *Nothing*. The Yattering - the demon in question - is going crazy. He is one dangerous demon, ready to pounce...

A new dark fantasy graphic novel from the bestselling author of *Imajica* and *The Great and Secret Show*. Also included: a stunning adaptation of Clive Barker's story *How Spoilers Bleed*.



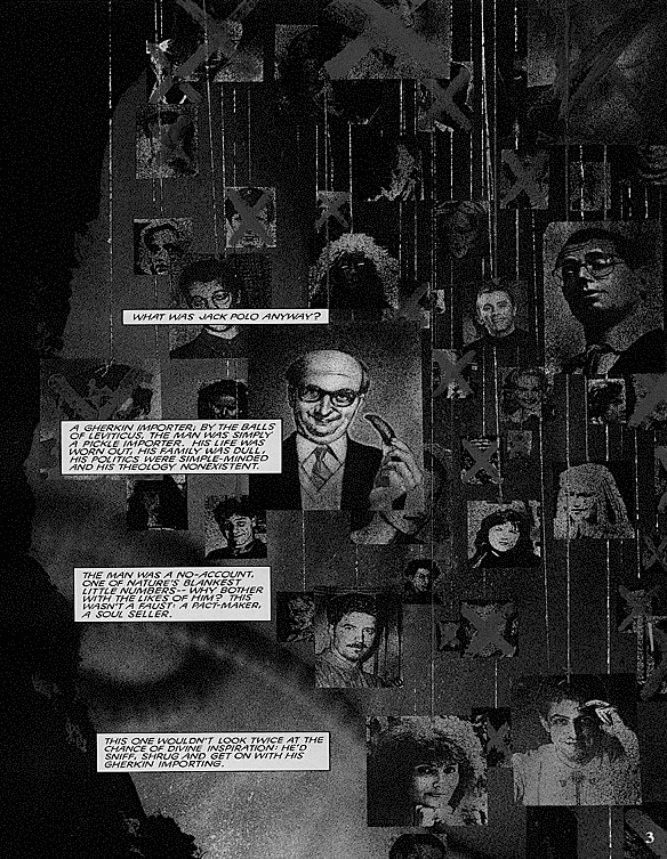
ISBN 1-56060-183-3

U.S. \$9.99
CAN. \$10.99



AFTER SIX MONTHS OF PURSUING THIS MAN POLO, THE YATTERING WAS BEGINNING TO SEE EXTINCTION AS AN EASY OPTION. THIS ENDLESS GAME OF HIDE AND SEEK WAS TO NOBODY'S BENEFIT, AND THE YATTERING'S IMMENSE FRUSTRATION.

IT FEARED ULCERS, IT FEARED PSYCHOSOMATIC LEPROSY, A CONDITION LOWER DEMONS LIKE ITSELF WERE SUSCEPTIBLE TO. WORST OF ALL THE YATTERING FEARED LOSING ITS TEMPER COMPLETELY AND KILLING THE MAN OUTRIGHT IN AN UNCONTROLLABLE FIT OF PIQUE.



WHAT WAS JACK POLO ANYWAY?

A GHERKIN IMPORTER, BY THE BALLS OF LEVITICUS, THE MAN WAS SIMPLY A PICKLE IMPORTER. HIS LIFE WAS WORN OUT, HIS FAMILY WAS DULL, HIS POLITICS WERE SIMPLE-MINDED AND HIS THEOLOGY NONEXISTENT.

THE MAN WAS A NO-ACCOUNT, ONE OF NATURE'S BLANKEST, LITTLE NUMBERS-- WHY BOTHER WITH THE LIKES OF HIM? THIS WASN'T A FAULT, A PACT-MAKER, A SOUL SELLER.

THIS ONE WOULDN'T LOOK TWICE AT THE CHANCE OF DIVINE INSPIRATION: HE'D SNIFF, SHRUG AND GET ON WITH HIS GHERKIN IMPORTING.